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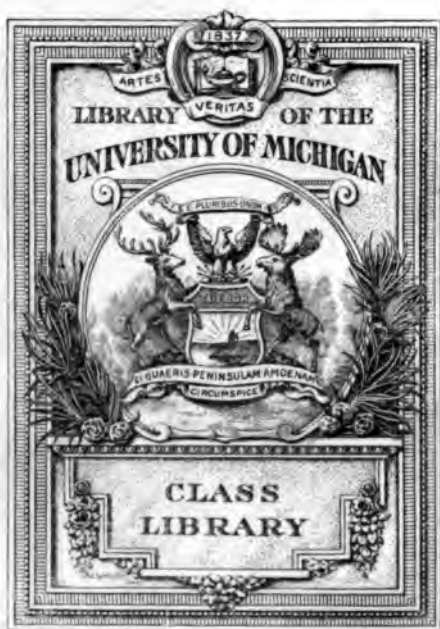
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King Arthur
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Merlin and Sir Balin

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**THE BOOK OF MERLIN
THE BOOK OF SIR BALIN**

**FROM MALORY'S KING ARTHUR
WITH CAXTON'S PREFACE**

**EDITED, WITH AN INTRODUCTORY
SKETCH AND GLOSSARY**

BY

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that euer I herde speke of / I haue aspyed / thy kynge met ne-
 uer yet with worshipful man / but telle hym / I wyl haue his
 lode withoute he doo me homage / thenne the messenger departed
T Now is there ony her said Arthur that knoweth kyng Ry-
 ons / thenne answered a knyght that hight Naram / Spee I kno-
 we the kynge wel / he is a passeng good man of his body / as
 folwe ten bypunge / and a passeng proude man / and se doute
 ye not / he wylle make warre on yow with a myghty puffed
 unce / wel said Arthur I shall ordeyne for hym in short tyme

Capitulum xxviii
 Hene kyng arthur lette sende for al the childre born on
 may day begott of lordes & born of ladyes / for Merlyn
 told kyng Arthur that he that shold destroye hym / shold be
 borne in may day / wherfor he sent for hym all upon payn of deeth
 and so ther were founde many lordes sones / and all were sente
 into the kyng / and soo was Mordred sente by kyng Lotts
 wyf / and all were put in a ship to the see / and some were iiii
 yerkes old and some lasse / And so by fortune the shyp drowe
 into a castel and was al to ryem and destroyed the most part
 sauf that Mordred was ast up and a good man founde hym /
 and noursished hym tyl he was viii yere olde / & thenne he
 brought hym to the Court / as it retereth afterward towarde
 the ende of the deeth of Arthur / So many lordes and barons of
 this reame were displeased / for her children were so lost / and
 many put the lyke on Merlyn more than on Arthur / so what
 for drede and for hane they helde their ptes / But whanne the
 messenger came to kyng Ryons / thenne was he wode oute of
 meure and pursued hym for a grete hoost as it retereth af-
 ter in the booke of Balyn & sauage that foloweth next after /
 both by aduenture Balyn gat the sberdy

Exposit after primus

Incipit after secundus

After the deeth of Otherpendragon reigned Ar-
 thur his sone / the which had grete werre in his
 dayes for to gete al Engkond in to his hand /
 For there were many kynges within the walls
 of Engkond and in Walpe / Scotland and
 Cornelbaille / Soo it befelle on a tyme / whanne kyng Arthur



KING ARTHUR'S ROUND TABLE

A work of art, in Winchester Castle, of doubtful date, 1235-1425; repainted by order of Henry VIII; names and other details are represented only approximately in reproductions; referred to by Caxton (see page xx), and by Hardyng, Leland, Paulus Jovius, de Vera, Ashmole, and others.

INTRODUCTORY SKETCH

• In the year 1476, William Caxton returned to England, bringing with him his type and presses, and set up, at the Red Pale in Westminster, the first English press. Born in Kent, provided with a good education, and apprenticed to the Mercers' Company, he had gone abroad, when about twenty years of age, to Bruges. There, in the City of the Bells, he became a merchant, and ultimately Governor of the English "Nation," or colony of merchants and traders. His bookish tastes led him to begin a translation of the "*Recueil des Histories de Troye*," and this, in turn, to an interest in the new art of printing, and to a study of it at Bruges and Cologne, which brought him back at last, after thirty years, to become the first English printer, and to win for himself a great name, not only through the craft he followed with such industry and devotion, but also through his diligence and skill as a translator.

Absorbed in his work both on its scholarly and on its business side, for he was a shrewd business man, and cheered by the friendship of princes, nobles, churchmen, and great merchants, he achieved labors little less than prodigious. In fourteen years he printed more than eighteen thousand pages, nearly all of folio size (the larger the better, as each had to be pulled by hand separately from the press), and nearly eighty separate books, some of which passed through

two and a few through three editions,¹ though he is supposed to have had not more than three assistants. Moreover, he translated some twenty-one books from the French and Latin, and one from the Dutch. He used paper, rarely vellum. His types were in the black-letter, — we owe our use of the clear and legible Roman to the happy accident that Henry VIII dedicated a work to the Pope, thereby gaining, amusingly enough, the title of “Defender of the Faith,” still borne by English sovereigns. They were copied so closely from the handwriting of his time that they have sometimes been mistaken for manuscript. He died in 1491. On his last day he was busy in translating the “*Vitæ Patrum*,” printed later by his assistant and successor, Wynkyn de Worde.²

Caxton’s prefaces are always of interest, owing to his comments upon the works they accompany, and because of the glimpses they give of his labors and the difficulties he encountered, one of which, as a notable passage in his preface to the “*Eneydos*” shows, was that of deciding what words or forms of words to prefer, where usage differed so widely in various parts of England, and between the speech of the learned and unlearned, the gentle and the simple. Much of Caxton’s spirit and attitude may be gathered from the example included in this volume. It is not possible to linger over the works he issued, important and full of interest though they are, — such, for example, as the “*Game and Pleye of the Chesse*,” the “*Book of*

¹ They have long commanded exceedingly high prices from collectors. The Malory has sold for £1950.

² See, regarding Caxton’s life, the *Dictionary of National Biography* (and references there given), and Morley’s *English Writers*, volume vi, for a convenient general account of the early history of printing and of Caxton.

Courtesie," "Reynard the Fox," the "Eneydos," and the "Golden Legend." Facsimiles of the first and last are accessible in many libraries, and will well repay the student's examination. But two great classics of English literature deserve special mention historically. One is the poems of Chaucer, for Caxton's issue of them in print must have done much to perpetuate and spread the fame and influence of the "Father of English Poetry." The other is Malory's "*Le Morte Darthur*," which, had Caxton not printed it, might not perhaps have entranced readers through long generations down to our own day, or served as a source wherefrom poets and painters of the nineteenth century might learn of Arthur, the quest of the Grail, and Tristan and Iseult. Indeed, but for Caxton, these stories might not have become in a real sense our permanent possession, for the few English versions, and the French, German, and Dutch versions, have for the most part become accessible only at a comparatively recent date, and, furthermore, in such form that others than students might never have been brought to a knowledge of them.

What is known of Malory is little enough. Caxton tells us that, being urged to print the story of Arthur, he used the book made by Sir Thomas Malory. Malory himself says, in its concluding words, that it was finished the ninth year of Edward IV, that is, between March 3, 1469, and March 4, 1470. Using this and other evidence, Professor George L. Kittredge¹ provisionally identifies the author, Sir

¹ See the *Harvard Studies and Notes in Philology and Literature*, iv, 85-105, or the abstract by Professor Kittredge forming part of Professor W. E. Mead's Introduction to his *Morte Darthur*, Boston, 1897, pp. xiii-xix.

Thomas Malory, with a gentleman of ancient lineage and soldier of that name, who succeeded to his father's estates about 1433 or 1434, after serving with the famous Richard of Warwick, sat in Parliament in 1445, took part in the Wars of the Roses, and died in 1470.¹

Malory's purpose was to take the various versions at hand in prose and verse and chiefly in French, of the Arthurian story, and compile from them a single convenient work, giving the story in its completeness. What was this story?² The legends concerning Arthur go back to a period before history, but not so far that we may not feel reasonably sure of their possessing some basis in historic fact. The original Arthur seems to have been a war-leader or chieftain, who in the fifth century led his people, presumably the southern Celts of England, whom we know as the Welsh and the Cornish, against the invaders from Germany, who afterwards became the Anglo-Saxons. Some of his

¹ The reader will find in Professor Kittredge's article a most romantic incident in the career of Sir Thomas's one-time leader, Earl Richard, that, as Professor Kittredge says, reads as if it might have been taken from the *Morte Darthur* itself.

² The student should first read Miss Weston's *King Arthur and his Knights*, David Nutt, London, 1899, and, with the general survey of the subject gained from this most helpful outline, he may then turn to the works of Rhys and Nutt, Newell's *King Arthur and the Round Table*, Houghton, Mifflin & Co., 1897, the Geoffrey of Monmouth and *Holy Grail* in the Temple Classics, and Miss Weston's admirable translations. The references in these will lead him to the whole literature of the subject. A special reference must also be given to the monumental edition of the *Morte Darthur* by Dr. H. Oskar Sommer (David Nutt, London, 3 vols., 1889-1891) and its most valuable studies on the sources, with the delightful appreciation it contains of Malory by Mr. Lang.

victories told of in the legends are perhaps historical. At all events, when we first hear of him in the "*Historia Britonum*" of Nennius, of the close of the eighth century, he is already a mythical hero. His story next appears in a famous work of the twelfth century, the "*Historia Britonum*" or "*Historia Regum Britanniæ*," by the gifted Welshman, Geoffrey of Monmouth, based partly on a Breton work, partly on oral tradition. Geoffrey's desire, clearly, was to prove that the Celtic people once possessed a world-conqueror, an Alexander. His history was already half poetry, and in the same century it was turned into verse by two Anglo-Norman poets, Gaimar, the first and really valuable part of whose work is lost, and Wace, in his "*Brut*." Wace, like Geoffrey, made many additions, apparently from current traditions. Geoffrey, for example, perhaps on the authority of his Breton source, first tells of Merlin, and Wace of the Round Table. From Wace, again with additions, the story passed about 1200 for the first time into English in the famous "*Brut*" of the parish priest Layamon ("May the Lord be gracious unto him !"), and thence about the beginning of the fourteenth century into the Anglo-French chronicle of Langtoft (Englished by Robert Manning) and the English chronicle of Robert of Gloucester. The original story (in bare outline) tells of the birth of Arthur, his becoming king, the demand from over seas that he shall pay tribute and how, in reply, he conquered Gaul and France; of the faithlessness of Queen Guinevere and Mordred at home during his absence, and his return to conquer Mordred, losing, however, his dearly beloved nephew, Gawaine, who had helped him in his wars abroad, and in the final battle his own life.

With the addition of the Round Table and its knights, as seen first in Wace, the inclusion in the cycle of any number of separate romances or episodes having to do with these knights became possible. To understand the further development of the cycle, it is necessary to remember that there were a great number of oral legends and traditions connected with Arthur, earlier than, and only in part included in, the works so far mentioned, but which, from time to time, became incorporated in it. It is a question still contested whether the development of these legends took place to a greater extent among the Celts of Brittany, whither it had been carried by the Celts of England, or in England. At all events, the Normans learned of the Arthurian story from Brittany in or before the first half of the eleventh century, and carried it to Sicily and southern Italy. In this way, even before Geoffrey wrote, it had become a common possession of Continental countries, and speedily won a preëminent place among romances as fitly affording a central theme to which courtly poets might attach stories of knightly adventure, whether versions of popular traditions or pure inventions. These stories of the Knights of the Round Table are well-nigh innumerable. By far the larger part have to do with Gawaine, who may originally have been the hero of an independent cycle. A second important character is Lancelot. The story of the loves of Lancelot and Guinevere developed into a long romance, and became the central theme of Malory, and through him of the Arthurian story proper in modern literature.

It must next be noted that the story of Arthur, because of its fame and importance, drew into itself two other famous stories, originally quite independent of

it. One is the story of Tristan and Iseult, which turns upon their drinking a love-potion unknowingly, as Tristan was taking Iseult to wed King Mark. A hopeless passion follows, and Tristan is finally banished to Brittany, where he weds a second Iseult, Iseult of the White Hands. On his deathbed he sends for the first Iseult. The messenger is bidden spread white sails if successful, black if he has failed. Tristan's wife tells him from the window that the sails are black, and he dies with his longing unfulfilled. The story appears in an inferior version in Malory, and was thence taken by Matthew Arnold, Mr. Swinburne, and Mr. Binyon.

The second story, which became merged into the Arthurian cycle, was the beautiful and moving legend of the Seeking of the Grail, the sacred vessel used by the Saviour in the Last Supper.¹ It was in the possession of Joseph of Arimathea, the "rich man" of the Bible, and comforted him during forty years' imprisonment, till freed by Vespasian. His sons take it on their wanderings into far lands to carry the Gospel, and then, in consequence of sin, it is held by the "Rich Fisher," sore stricken but unable to die, in an enchanted castle, until his son's son shall seek it out

¹ The Grail, Greal, or Sangreal ("holy greal") is properly the dish or platter, which, after it was used in the Last Supper, was also used by Joseph of Arimathea to receive the blood which flowed from the wounds of the Saviour. In the romances, properties connected with notable vessels of Celtic folklore and legend, such as the Cauldron of the Head of Hades, seem to have become associated with it (see Nutt, *Studies on the Legend of the Holy Grail*; Rhys, *The Arthurian Legend*). In Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival* it is a jewel or precious stone. By many, but quite erroneously, it is supposed to be the chalice used in the Last Supper.

and become its keeper. Percival, reared in solitude, comes to Arthur's court, and sets forth to find the Grail. Though delayed by things of this world, he remains pure, and at last achieves the quest, and the enchantments of Britain are ended. Percival (or Parsifal as in German) is the true knight of the Grail, and it is to be regretted that Galahad, owing to later versions, is made the achiever of the quest in Malory, and hence in English tradition, which is thus severed from the original tradition and the prevailing tradition of French and German literature. It is hardly necessary to refer the reader to Tennyson's "Quest of the Grail," Wagner's opera "Parsifal," and the mural paintings of Mr. Abbey in the Boston Public Library.

These stories were treated in long romances by courtly poets in France and Germany, of whom the more notable were Chrestien de Troyes and Wolfram von Eschenbach. An important point is the weaving together finally of different parts of the cycle, with insertion of many episodes but loosely attached to the main theme, into extended versions in prose, dating substantially from the first half of the thirteenth century. It was from these that Malory chiefly drew. Dr. Sommer in his standard edition has essayed the difficult, laborious, and uncertain task of examining Malory's sources. The subject is too complex to be entered into here, but his work may enable us to see what portions of Malory belong to the five main branches of the cycle: —

I. Merlin, or the early history of King Arthur. Books i-iv are from some version of the French prose "Merlin." Book v is from the English poem by the Northern poet, Huchown, "La Morte Arthure."

II. Lancelot, dealing with the later history and the death of King Arthur. Books vi, xi, xii, chapters 1-10, xiii-xvii, xix are

from some version of the French prose "Lancelot." Books xviii, xx, xxi are from an English poem, "Le Morte Arthur," or some common original.

III. The Quest of the Grail. Books xiii-xvii. The story is merged in the "Lancelot" as above.

IV. Tristan, treating of the story of Tristan and Iseult. Books viii, ix, x (except chapters 31-50), xii, chapters 11-14, are from some version of the French prose "Tristan."

V. The Prophecies of Merlin, having to do with Merlin's prophecies and including various adventures. Chapters 31-50 of Book x, telling of the adventures of Alisaunder le Orphelyn and the great tournament of Galahad of Surluse, are paralleled in two manuscripts of the "Prophecies of Merlin," in the British Museum.

The contents of part of Book vi, of Book vii, and parts of Books xii and xix cannot be found in existing versions. Sommer believes that the part of Book vii referred to was drawn from a lost romance of Gareth, and the other passages, with certain additional evidence, point, in his opinion, to the use by Malory of a lost version of the "Lancelot."

The laboriousness and difficulty of Malory's task cannot be judged simply from the fact that his work runs to eight hundred and twenty-six large octavo pages in Sommer's edition. It must be considered also that his originals were themselves enormous compilations and filled with interpolated episodes. With this in mind, it is unjust to judge him severely for not having given a more careful order and unity to his story, for admitting episodes that clog his main narrative, for leaving out effective details or incidents, or, in one case at least, for preferring of two versions before him one of less force and beauty. Such errors of omission or commission are in large part due doubtless to his originals, and in any case we are criticising him from a modern point of view. To any one even slightly familiar with versions similar to those Malory used, it will certainly seem that he made his compilation with

remarkable success. The reader not familiar with the mediæval versions will perhaps find but one chief cause for criticism, and that is the introduction of incidental episodes. Malory can hardly be blamed for this, considering that his originals were full of them, and that they are often of the greatest interest in themselves. Was he not, moreover, probably making his book chiefly for his own delight and convenience? And the modern reader, furthermore, will come to love this fault, if fault it be, as an essential element of the book's mediæval character.

On the other hand, how great are Malory's virtues, how large the debt we owe him! One primal virtue is the beauty of his style. When we remember at what time he lived, and that English prose was in its infancy, it seems little less than extraordinary that his sentences are so seldom involved and obscure grammatically, and further, considering that he was translating, that the words and constructions he uses are so free from foreign borrowings and idioms. His words are in large part pure Saxon, and, what is more, the number of words he uses that have become obsolete is surprisingly small. He is thought, indeed, like Caxton in his translations, to have had some influence upon the development of the language and of prose form. His style has, however, higher qualities than clearness, simplicity, and directness. These higher qualities are bound up with a second virtue, namely that, looking apart from his book as a whole, and conceding that it was impossible that he should stick too closely and prudishly to a main line of narrative, he shows the art of a born story-teller in the lesser episodes and incidents that make up his work, — a praise belonging *no doubt in part* to the originals he drew from. He

has the gift of giving only what is essential in a story, the little touches, in addition to the necessary record of events, hardly noted in themselves, that place the story, the occurrence, the persons that take part, instantly and vividly before the imagination, if that be truly awake and in sympathy. This may afford a suggestion for the reader. He must not expect to have the vitalizing elements of the narrative forced upon him and emphasized after the modern manner, so that he cannot miss them, however dense or indifferent he may be. He must pause to let each simple, picture-making phrase deliver its full message. When we read, for example, how Arthur went to fetch the sword fixed fast by its point in the anvil, and "handled the sword by the handles, and lightly and fiercely pulled it out of the stone," we must pause upon the words "lightly and fiercely" to see the gallant young figure in the flowering of its strength, as well as to muse upon that miraculous attestation of Arthur's kingly mission. For those who love Malory truly, the close union of his clear perception of the essential detail of the story he is telling and his gift for its expression affords one of the chief delights in reading him. "He is," says a most acute and discriminating English critic, never led astray by his personal enthusiasms, Mr. W. P. Ker, "an author and an artist, and his style is his own."

Together with the intrinsic merit of Malory's work and its inherent right to be considered a great English classic must be noted the debt we owe it for having perpetuated the Arthurian story in an accessible and complete form through the centuries, and for having provided a source for poems and paintings of our own time, in themselves a precious and an enduring

possession. That it was read with eagerness in the sixteenth century we know from Roger Ascham. Chroniclers and dramatists drew from it, and Spenser used it. Professor Mead is inclined to think it could not have been read to any great extent in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, for the reason, as he says, that one edition, that of 1634, seems to have sufficed till the nineteenth century. He has overlooked, however, the testimony of William Nicholson in 1696, who speaks of it as "A book that is, in our days, often sold by the ballad-mongers with the like authentick records of Guy of Warwick and Bevis of Southampton." But even granting that it was read, perhaps, by few but antiquarians in the eighteenth century, it certainly came to its own after the romantic movement and the better understanding of mediæval literature it led to, which culminated at the beginning of the nineteenth century. To Southey's edition and to Tennyson's "Idylls of the King" is due the fact that the story of Arthur is again well known to the general reading public. All but three of the "Idylls" are based upon Malory,¹ with many changes and additions, and with entire adaptation, ethically and psy-

¹ The parts of Malory used by Tennyson are as follows : "The Coming of Arthur," Books i, iii ; "Gareth and Lynette," Book vii ; "Balin and Balan," Book ii ; "Lancelot and Elaine," Book xviii, chapters 8-20 ; "The Holy Grail," Books xiii-xvii ; "Pelleas and Etarre," Book iv, chapters 19-29, Book xix, chapter 11 ; "The Last Tournament," Books viii-x, xii, chapters 11-14, Book xx, chapter vi ; "Guinevere," Book xxi, chapter 9 (with substitution of Arthur for Lancelot and other changes) ; "The Passing of Arthur," Book xxi. The subjects of "The Marriage of Geraint" and "Geraint and Enid" (formerly one idyll, "Enid" and of "Merlin and Vivien," were drawn from Lady Guest's *citation from The Romance of Merlin* in her *Mabinogion*.

chologically, to modern conditions. Tennyson sometimes follows Malory closely, even verbally, sometimes abandons him wholly. It must be granted that those who know the earlier versions cannot repress a certain impatience at times as regards Tennyson's alteration of the stories and his modernization of their intention, the symbolic, or, to use his own term, "parabolic," significance he gave them, — a feeling which cannot apply, of course, to their noble poetry, — however freely his right may be conceded to change them, as they were freely changed by the successive mediæval poets who used them. It would be profanation to liken the "Idylls," with Carlyle, to "superlative lollipops," but one sympathizes with Frederic Harrison, who, speaking of Malory's Arthur, says: "Beside this simple, manly type of the mediæval hero, the figures in the 'Idylls of the King' look like the dainty Perseus of Canova placed beside the heroic Theseus of Pheidias." But this feeling of impatience is undoubtedly both ungrateful and unreasonable. Tennyson's "Idylls" stand for what they are in themselves.

In Matthew Arnold's "Tristram and Iseult" and Mr. Swinburne's "Tristram of Lyonesse" there is similar, though less, freedom of alteration. The reader may well be urged, if he has not done so, to compare these two poems and Mr. Laurence Binyon's "Tristram and Isolt," to learn how differently poets of diverse temperament and inspiration can treat an ancient romantic theme, as well as to argue the expediency of the use of such themes by modern poets, and to consider the question of the extent of liberty permissible in respect to their modification and adaptation.

Mr. Swinburne's "Tale of Balen," also, is based on Malory, and should be read in connection with

the second book in this volume in illustration how readily the "Morte Darthur," essentially in the broad sense poetry, lends itself to the definite, accepted medium of poetry, verse.

William Morris used Malory in "The Defence of Guinevere," "King Arthur's Tomb," "Sir Galahad," and "The Chapel in Lyonesse." To this list may be added Blackmore's epic of "King Arthur" of the seventeenth century, and, of the nineteenth century, Heber's "Morte Arthur," Hawker's "Quest of the Sangreal," the plays of "King Arthur" by Bulwer and by Mr. Carr, and the Arthurian dramas, "The Quest of Merlin," "The Marriage of Guenevere," "The Birth of Galahad," and "Taliesin," of the American poet, Richard Hovey, with the shorter poems of Tennyson, "The Lady of Shalott," "Sir Galahad," and "Sir Lancelot and Queen Guenevere." The greater number of these and various scattered poems by obscure authors, as well as Lowell's "Vision of Sir Launfal," draw little or nothing from Malory, or are inventions conformed to the modern conception, derived chiefly from Tennyson, of the Arthur story and of the age of romance.

The two books of the "Morte Darthur" which follow include the beginning of the story of Arthur and the beautiful tale of Balin and Balan. It was thought better to give a somewhat extended portion of Malory rather than a series of fragments culled here and there, and the first two books were preferably selected that the reader might have the opening of the story. The spelling and form of words is necessarily modernized, as Caxton's orthography offers a real obstacle to the average reader. In no case, however, is there substitution of one word for another, as the glossary pro-

vides all needed help in the case of the few obsolete terms. Modern taste has demanded the alteration of one or two passages, but of only one of more than a few lines. The text is based on Sommer's edition (see page iv, note 2) of Caxton's print of 1485.

With this introduction, necessarily limited to dry historic fact though there is so much besides which it stirs the heart to think of, this noble English classic is commended to the reader. Sir Edward Creasy has said of it that "hardly any book in our language deserves the epithet of dull so little," and Sir Walter Scott pronounced it "indisputably the best prose romance the language can boast." But it lives best in the memory in Caxton's phrase, as "this noble and joyous book" that he set in print "to the intent that noble men may see and learn the noble acts of chivalry, the gentle and virtuous deeds that some knights used in those days, by which they came to honor, and how they that were vicious were punished and oft put to shame and rebuke; humbly beseeching all noble lords and ladies with all other estates of what estate or degree they be of, that shall see and read in this said book and work, that they take the good and honest acts in their remembrance, and to follow the same, wherein they shall find many joyous and pleasant histories, and noble and renowned acts of humanity, gentleness, and chivalry. For herein may be seen noble chivalry, courtesy, humanity, friendliness, hardiness, love, friendship, cowardice, murder, hate, virtue, and sin. Do after the good, and leave the evil, and it shall bring you to good fame and renown."

CAXTON'S PREFACE

AFTER that I had accomplished and finished divers histories, as well of contemplation as of other historial and worldly acts of great conquerors and princes, and also certain books of ensamples and doctrine, many noble and divers gentlemen of this realm of England, came and demanded me, many and oftentimes, wherefore that I have not done made and enprinted the noble history of the Saint Greal, and of the most renowned Christian king, first and chief of the three best Christian and worthy, King Arthur, which ought most to be remembered among us Englishmen, tofore all other Christian kings; for it is notoriously known, through the universal world, that there be nine worthy and the best that ever were, that is, to wit, three Paynims, three Jews, and three Christian men. As for the Paynims, they were before the Incarnation of Christ, which were named, the first, Hector of Troy, of whom the history is common, both in ballad and in prose; the second, Alexander the Great; and the third, Julius Cæsar, Emperor of Rome, of whom the histories be well known and had. And as for the three Jews, which also were before the Incarnation of our Lord, of whom the first was Duke Joshua, which brought the children of Israel into the land of behest; the second David, King of Jerusalem; and the third Judas Maccabeus. Of these three, the Bible rehearseth all their noble histories and acts. And, since the said Incarnation, have *been three noble Christian men stalled and admitted*

through the universal world into the number of the nine best and worthy. Of whom was first, the noble Arthur, whose noble acts I purpose to write in this present book here following; the second was Charlemagne, or Charles the Great, of whom the history is had in many places, both in French and English; and the third and last was Godfrey of Boulogne, of whose acts and life I made a book unto the excellent prince and king, of noble memory, King Edward the Fourth.

The said noble gentlemen instantly required me to imprint the history of the said noble king and conqueror, King Arthur, and of his knights, with the history of the Saint Greal and of the death and ending of the said Arthur, affirming that I ought rather to imprint his acts and noble feats, than of Godfrey of Boulogne, or any of the other eight, considering that he was a man born within this realm, and king and emperor of the same; and that there be in French divers and many noble volumes of his acts, and also of his knights. To whom I answered, that divers men hold opinion that there was no such Arthur, and that all such books as be made of him be but feigned and fables, because that some chronicles make of him no mention, nor remember him nothing, nor of his knights. Whereto they answered, and one in especial said, that in him that should say or think that there was never such a king called Arthur, might well be aretted great folly and blindness; for he said that there were many evidences to the contrary. First, ye, may see his sepulchre in the monastery of Glastonbury; and also in "*Polychronicon*"¹ in the fifth book, the sixth chapter, and in the seventh book, the twenty-

¹ A universal history by Higden, translated by John of Trevisa; the translation was printed by Caxton.

third chapter, where his body was buried, and after found, and translated into the said monastery. Ye shall see also in the history of Bochas,¹ in his book "De Casu Principum," part of his noble acts, and also of his fall. Also Galfridus, in his British book, recounteth his life. And in divers places of England, many remembrances be yet of him, and shall remain perpetually, and also of his knights:—First, in the Abbey of Westminster, at Saint Edward's shrine, remaineth the print of his seal in red wax closed in beryl, in which is written: "Patricius Arthurus Britanniae, Galliae, Germaniae, Daciae Imperator." Item, in the castle of Dover, ye may see Gawaine's skull, and Cradok's mantle; at Winchester, the Round Table; in other places, Launcelot's sword, and many other things. Then all these things considered, there can no man reasonably gainsay but there was a king of this land named Arthur; for in all places, Christian and heathen, he is reputed and taken for one of the nine worthy, and the first of the three Christian men. And also he is more spoken of beyond the sea, and more books made of his noble acts, than there be in England, as well in Dutch, Italian, Spanish, and Greek, as in French. And yet of record, remain in witness of him in Wales, in the town of Camelot,² the great stones, and the marvellous works of iron lying under the ground, and royal vaults, which

¹ Giovanni Boccaccio; the work referred to is usually known as *De Casibus Virorum*.

² Camelot, the city of Arthur (see Sommer, vol. ii. p. 157 note), is not in Wales, as Caxton says, and is not Winchester, as Malory says (Book ii, chapter 19), but is to be identified with Camel in Somerset, where its remains are still to be seen. The identification of places in Arthurian romance is uncertain, and important only in scholarly investigations.

divers now living have seen. Wherefore it is a great marvel why he is no more renowned in his own country, save only it accordeth to the word of God, which saith, that no man is accepted for a prophet in his own country. Then all these things aforesaid alleged, I could not well deny but that there was such a noble king named Arthur, and reputed for one of the nine worthy, and first and chief of the Christian men. And many noble volumes be made of him and of his noble knights in French, which I have seen and read beyond the sea, which be not had in our maternal tongue. But in Welsh be many, and also in French, and some in English, but nowhere nigh all. Wherefore, such as have late been drawn out briefly into English, I have, after the simple cunning that God hath sent to me, under the favour and correction of all noble lords and gentlemen enprised to imprint a book of the noble histories of the said King Arthur, and of certain of his knights after a copy unto me delivered; which copy Sir Thomas Malory did take out of certain books of French, and reduced it into English. And I, according to my copy, have done set it in print, to the intent that noble men may see and learn the noble acts of chivalry, the gentle and virtuous deeds, that some knights used in those days, by which they came to honour, and how they that were vicious were punished and oft put to shame and rebuke; humbly beseeching all noble lords and ladies, with all other estates of what estate or degree they be of, that shall see and read in this said book and work, that they take the good and honest acts in their remembrance, and to follow the same, wherein they shall find many joyous and pleasant histories, and noble and renowned acts of humanity, gentleness, and chiv-

alry. For herein may be seen noble chivalry, courtesy, humanity, friendliness, hardiness, love, friendship, cowardice, murder, hate, virtue, and sin. Do after the good, and leave the evil, and it shall bring you to good fame and renown. And, for to pass the time, this book shall be pleasant to read in, but for to give faith and belief that all is true that is contained herein, ye be at your liberty. But all is written for our doctrine, and for to beware that we fall not to vice nor sin, but to exercise and follow virtue, by which we may come and attain to good fame and renown in this life, and after this short and transitory life to come unto everlasting bliss in heaven; the which He grant us that reigneth in heaven, the blessed Trinity. Amen.

Then to proceed forth in this said book, which I direct unto all noble princes, lords and ladies, gentlemen or gentlewomen, that desire to read or hear read of the noble and joyous history of the great conqueror and excellent king, King Arthur, sometime king of this noble realm then called Britain, I, William Caxton, simple person, present this book following, which I have enprised to imprint; and treateth of the noble acts, feats of arms of chivalry, prowess, hardiness, humanity, love, courtesy, and very gentleness, with many wonderful histories and adventures. And for to understand briefly the content of this volume, I have divided it into twenty-one books, and every book chaptered, as hereafter shall by God's grace follow. The first book shall treat how Uther Pendragon got the noble conqueror, King Arthur, and containeth twenty-eight chapters. The second book treateth of Balin, the noble knight, and containeth nineteen chapters. *The third book treateth of the marriage of*

King Arthur to Queen Guenevere, with other matters, and containeth fifteen chapters. The fourth book, how Merlin was assotted, and of war made to King Arthur, and containeth twenty-nine chapters. The fifth book treateth of the conquest of Lucius the emperor, and containeth twelve chapters. The sixth book treateth of Sir Launcelot and Sir Lionel, and marvellous adventures, and containeth eighteen chapters. The seventh book treateth of a noble knight called Sir Gareth, and named by Sir Kay Beaumains, and containeth thirty-six chapters. The eighth book treateth of the birth of Sir Tristram, the noble knight, and of his acts, and containeth forty-one chapters. The ninth book treateth of a knight named by Sir Kay Le Cote Male Taille, and also of Sir Tristram, and containeth forty-four chapters. The tenth book treateth of Sir Tristram, and other marvellous adventures, and containeth eighty-eight chapters. The eleventh book treateth of Sir Launcelot and Sir Galahad, and containeth fourteen chapters. The twelfth book treateth of Sir Launcelot and his madness, and containeth fourteen chapters. The thirteenth book treateth how Galahad came first to King Arthur's court, and the quest how the Saint Greal was begun, and containeth twenty chapters. The fourteenth book treateth of the quest of the Saint Greal, and containeth ten chapters. The fifteenth book treateth of Sir Launcelot, and containeth six chapters. The sixteenth book treateth of Sir Bors and Sir Lionel, his brother, and containeth seventeen chapters. The seventeenth book treateth of the Saint Greal, and containeth twenty-three chapters. The eighteenth book treateth of Sir Launcelot and the queen, and containeth twenty-five chapters. The nineteenth book treat-

eth of Queen Guenevere and Launcelot, and containeth thirteen chapters. The twentieth book treateth of the piteous death of Arthur, and containeth twenty-two chapters. The twenty-first book treateth of his last departing, and how Sir Launcelot came to revenge his death, and containeth thirteen chapters. The sum is twenty-one books, which contain the sum of five hundred and seven chapters, as more plainly shall follow hereafter.

KING ARTHUR

BOOK I

THE BOOK OF MERLIN

I. IT befell in the days of Uther Pendragon, when he was King of England, and so reigned, that there was a mighty duke in Cornwall, that held war against him long time, and the duke was called the Duke of Tintagil. And so, by means, King Uther sent for this duke, charging him to bring his wife with him, for she was called a fair lady, and a passing wise, and her name was called Igraine.

So when the duke and his wife were come to the king, by the means of great lords they were accorded both. The king liked and loved this lady well, and he made them great cheer out of measure. Then, for that Uther loved her, Igraine spake to the duke, her husband, and said, "Husband, I counsel you that we depart from hence suddenly, that we may ride all night unto our own castle." And in like wise as she said, so they departed, that neither the king, nor none of his council, were ware of their departing.

As soon as King Uther knew of their departing so suddenly, he was wonderly wroth. Then he called to him his privy council, and told them of the sudden departing of the duke and his wife. Then they advised the king to send for the duke and his wife by a great charge, "And, if he will not come at your summons, then may ye do your best; then have ye

cause to make mighty war upon him." So that was done, and the messengers had their answers, and that was this, shortly, "That neither he nor his wife would not come at him." Then was the king wonderly wroth. And then the king sent him plain word again, and bade him be ready, and stuff him and garnish him, "for within forty days he would fetch him out of the biggest castle that he hath." When the duke had this warning, anon he went and furnished and garnished two strong castles of his, of the which the one hight Tintagil, and the other castle hight Terabil. So his wife, dame Igraine, he put in the castle of Tintagil, and he put himself in the castle of Terabil, the which had many issues and posterns out. Then in all haste came Uther, with a great host, and laid a siege about the castle of Terabil, and there he pitched many pavilions. And there was great war made on both parties, and much people slain.

Then for pure anger and for great love of fair Igraine, King Uther fell sick. So came to King Uther Sir Ulfius, a noble knight, and asked the king, why he was sick. "I shall tell thee," said the king; "I am sick for anger and for love of fair Igraine, that I may not be whole." "Well, my lord," said Sir Ulfius, "I shall seek Merlin, and he shall do you remedy, that your heart shall be pleased." So Ulfius departed, and by adventure he met Merlin in a beggar's array; and there Merlin asked Ulfius whom he sought. And he said he had little ado to tell him. "Well," said Merlin, "I know whom thou seekest, for thou seekest Merlin; therefore seek no further, for I am he. And if King Uther will well reward me, and be sworn unto me to fulfil my desire, that *shall be his honour and profit more than mine, for I*

shall cause him to have all his desire." "All this will I undertake," said Ulfius, "that there shall be nothing reasonable, but thou shalt have thy desire." "Well," said Merlin, "he shall have his intent and desire; and, therefore," said Merlin, "ride on your way, for I will not be long behind."

II. Then Ulfius was glad, and rode on more than a pace till that he came to King Uther Pendragon, and told him he had met with Merlin. "Where is he?" said the king. "Sir," said Ulfius, "he will not dwell long." Therewithal Ulfius was ware where Merlin stood at the porch of the pavilion's door; and then Merlin was bound to come to the king. When King Uther saw him, he said that he was welcome. "Sir," said Merlin, "I know all your heart, every deal; so you will be sworn to me, as you be a true king anointed, to fulfil my desire, you shall have your desire." Then the king was sworn upon the four Evangelists. "Sir," said Merlin, "this is my desire; by Igraine you shall have a child, and when it is born that it shall be delivered to me for to nourish there, as I will have it; for it shall be your worship, and the child's avail as mickle as the child is worth." "I will well," said the king, "as thou wilt have it."

Now the Duke of Tintagil espied how the king rode from the siege of Terabil; and, therefore, that night he issued out of the castle at a postern for to have distressed the king's host; and so through his own issue the duke himself was slain, or ever the king was at the castle of Tintagil. So after the death of the duke, King Uther came unto Igraine more than three hours after his death. Then all the barons, by one assent, prayed the king of accord between the lady Igraine and him. The king gave them leave, for fain

would he have been accorded with her. So the king put all his trust in Ulfius to entreat between them; so by the entreaty, at the last, the king and she met together. "Now will we do well," said Ulfius; "our king is a lusty knight, and wifeless, and my lady Igraine is a passing fair lady; it were great joy unto us all, and it might please the king to make her his queen." Unto that they were all well agreed, and moved it to the king. And anon, like a lusty knight, he assented thereto with good will; and so, in all haste, they were married in a morning with great mirth and joy. And King Lot of Lothian and of Orkney then wedded Margawse, that was Gawaine's mother; and King Nentres, of the land of Garlot, wedded Elaine. All this was done at the request of King Uther. And the third sister, Morgan le Fay, was put to school in a nunnery; and there she learned so much, that she was a great clerk of necromancy; and, after, she was wedded to King Uriens, of the land of Gore, that was Sir Ewaine le Blanchemaine's father.

III. Then Queen Igraine drew daily nearer the time when the child Arthur should be born. So soon came Merlin unto the king, and said, "Sir, you must purvey you for the nourishing of your child." "As thou wilt," said the king, "be it." "Well," said Merlin, "I know a lord of yours, in this land, that is a passing true man and faithful, and he shall have the nourishing of your child, and his name is Sir Ector, and he is a lord of fair livelihood in many parts in England and Wales. And this lord, Sir Ector, let him be sent for, for to come and speak with you, and desire him yourself, as he loveth you, that he will put his own child to nourishing to another woman, and that his wife nourish yours. And when the child is

born, let it be delivered unto me, at yonder privy postern, unchristened." So like as Merlin [had] devised, it was done. And when Sir Ector was come, he made affiance to the king for to nourish the child, like as the king desired; and there the king granted Sir Ector great rewards. Then when the child was born, the king commanded two knights and two ladies to take the child, bound in a cloth of gold, "And that ye deliver him to what poor man ye meet at the postern gate of the castle." So the child was delivered unto Merlin, and so he bare it forth unto Sir Ector, and made an holy man to christen him, and named him Arthur; and so Sir Ector's wife nourished him.

[IV.] Then within two years King Uther fell sick of a great malady; and in the meanwhile his enemies usurped upon him, and did a great battle upon his men, and slew many of his people. "Sir," said Merlin, "ye may not lie so as ye do, for ye must to the field, though ye ride on an horse-litter; for ye shall never have the better of your enemies but if your person be there, and then shall ye have the victory." So it was done as Merlin had devised, and they carried the king forth in an horse-litter, with a great host, towards his enemies. And at Saint Albans there met with the king a great host of the North; and that day Sir Ulfius and Sir Brastias did great deeds of arms, and King Uther's men overcame the northern battle, and slew many people, and put the remnant to flight. And then the king returned to London, and made great joy of his victory.

And then he fell passing sore sick, so that three days and three nights he was speechless; wherefore all the barons made great sorrow, and asked Merlin what counsel were best. "There is not none other remedy,"

said Merlin, "but God will have his will; but look ye all barons be before King Uther to-morn, and God and I shall make him to speak." So on the morn all the barons, with Merlin, came tofore the king; then Merlin said aloud unto King Uther, "Sir, shall your son Arthur be king after your days of this realm, with all the appurtenance?" Then Uther Pendragon turned him and said, in hearing of them all, "I give him God's blessing and mine, and bid him pray for my soul, and righteously and worshipfully that he claim the crown upon forfeiture of my blessing." And therewith he yielded up the ghost. And then was he interred as belonged unto a king: wherefore the queen, fair Igraine, made great sorrow, and all the barons.

[V.] Then stood the ream in great jeopardy long while, for every lord that was mighty of men made him strong, and many weened to have been king. Then Merlin went to the Archbishop of Canterbury, and counselled him for to send for all the lords of the realm, and all the gentlemen of arms, that they should to London come by Christmas, upon pain of cursing; and for this cause, that Jesus, that was born on that night, that He would of His great mercy show some miracle as He was come to be king of mankind, for to show some miracle who should be rightwise king of this realm. So the archbishop, by the advice of Merlin, sent for all the lords and gentlemen of arms, that they should come by Christmas Even unto London, and many of them made them clean of their life, that their prayer might be the more acceptable unto God. So in the greatest church of London (whether it were Paul's or not the French book maketh no mention), all the estates were, long ere day, in the church
for to pray.

And when matins and the first mass was done, there was seen in the churchyard, against the high altar, a great stone, four-square, like unto a marble stone, and in [the] midst thereof was like an anvil of steel, a foot on high, and therein stuck a fair sword, naked by the point, and letters there were written in gold about the sword that said thus, "Whoso pulleth out this sword of this stone and anvil is rightwise king born of all England." Then the people marvelled and told it to the archbishop. "I command," said the archbishop, "that ye keep you within your church, and pray unto God still that no man touch the sword till the high mass be all done." So when all masses were done, all the lords went to behold the stone and the sword. And when they saw the scripture, some assayed, such as would have been king; but none might stir the sword, nor move it. "He is not here," said the archbishop, "that shall achieve the sword, but doubt not God will make him known. But this is my counsel," said the archbishop, "that we let purvey ten knights, men of good fame, and they to keep this sword." So it was ordained, and then there was made a cry, that every man should assay that would for to win the sword.

And, upon New Year's Day, the barons let make a joust and a tournament, that all knights that would joust or tourney there might play; and all this was ordained for to keep the lords together, and the commons, for the archbishop trusted that God would make him known that should win the sword. So, upon New Year's Day, when the service was done, the barons rode unto the field, some to joust, and some to tourney. And so it happed that Sir Ector, that had great livelihood about London, rode unto the jousts, and with

him rode Sir Kaye, his son, and young Arthur, that was his nourished brother; and Sir Kaye was made knight at Allhallowmas afore. So as they rode towards the jousts, Sir Kaye [had] lost his sword, for he had left it at his father's lodging, and so he prayed young Arthur to ride for his sword. "I will well," said Arthur, and rode fast after the sword. And when he came home, the lady and all were out to see the jousting. Then was Arthur wroth, and said to himself, "I will ride to the churchyard and take the sword with me that sticketh in the stone, for my brother, Sir Kaye, shall not be without a sword this day." And so, when he came to the churchyard, Sir Arthur alighted, and tied his horse to the stile, and so he went to the tent, and found no knights there, for they were at the jousting. And so he handled the sword by the handles, and lightly and fiercely pulled it out of the stone, and took his horse, and rode his way until he came to his brother, Sir Kaye, and delivered him the sword.

And, as soon as Sir Kaye saw the sword, he wist well that it was the sword of the stone; and so he rode to his father, Sir Ector, and said, "Sir, lo! here is the sword of the stone; wherefore I must be king of this land." When Sir Ector beheld the sword, he returned again, and came to the church, and there they alighted all three, and went into the church, and anon he made Sir Kaye swear upon a book how he came to that sword. "Sir," said Sir Kaye, "by my brother, Arthur, for he brought it to me." "How got you this sword?" said Sir Ector to Arthur. "Sir, I will tell you. When I came home for my brother's sword, I *found nobody at home to deliver me his sword, and so I thought my brother, Sir Kaye, should not be*

swordless, and so I came hither eagerly, and pulled it out of the stone without any pain." "Found ye any knights about this sword?" said Sir Ector. "Nay," said Arthur. "Now," said Sir Ector to Arthur, "I understand that you must be king of this land." "Wherefore I?" said Arthur, "and for what cause?" "Sir," said Ector, "for God will have it so, for there should never man have drawn out this sword, but he that shall be rightwise king of this land. Now let me see whether ye can put the sword there as it was, and pull it out again." "That is no mastery," said Arthur; and so he put it in the stone. Wherewithal Sir Ector assayed to pull out the sword, and failed.

VI. "Now assay," said Sir Ector unto Sir Kaye. And anon he pulled at the sword with all his might, but it would not be. "Now shall ye assay," said Sir Ector to Arthur. "I will well," said Arthur, and pulled it out easily. And therewithal Sir Ector kneeled down to the earth, and Sir Kaye. "Alas!" said Arthur, "mine own dear father and brother, why kneel you to me?" "Nay, nay, my lord Arthur, it is not so. I was never your father, nor of your blood, but I wot well that you are of an higher blood than I weened you were." And then Sir Ector told him all how he was betaken him for to nourish him, and by whose commandment, and by Merlin's deliverance. Then Arthur made great dole when he understood that Sir Ector was not his father. "Sir," said Ector unto Arthur, "will you be my good and gracious lord when you are king?" "Else were I to blame," said Arthur, "for you are the man in the world that I am most beholding to, and my good lady and mother, your wife, that, as well as her own, hath fostered me

and kept; and, if ever it be God's will that I be king, as ye say, ye shall desire of me what I may do, and I shall not fail you. God forbid I should fail you!" "Sir," said Sir Ector, "I will ask no more of you, but that you will make my son, your foster brother, Sir Kaye, seneschal of all your lands." "That shall be done," said Arthur, "and more, by the faith of my body, — that never man shall have that office but he, while he and I live." Therewithal they went unto the archbishop, and told him how the sword was achieved, and by whom. And, on Twelfth Day, all the barons came thither and to assay to take the sword who that would assay. But there afore them all there might none take it out but Arthur, wherefore there were many great lords wroth, and said, "It was great shame unto them all and the realm, to be overgoverned with a boy of no high blood born." And so they fell out at that time, that it was put off till Candlemas, and then all the barons should meet there again. But alway the ten knights were ordained to watch the sword day and night; and so they set a pavilion over the stone and the sword, and five always watched.

So at Candlemas many more great lords came thither for to have won the sword, but there might none prevail; and right as Arthur did at Christmas he did at Candlemas, and pulled out the sword easily, whereof the barons were sore aggrieved, and put it off in delay till the high feast of Easter; and, as Arthur sped afore, so did he at Easter. Yet there were some of the great lords had indignation that Arthur should be king, and put it off in a delay till the feast of Pentecost. Then the Archbishop of Canterbury, by *Merlin's providence*, let purvey then of the best knights

that they might get, and such knights as Uther Pendragon loved best, and most trusted in his days; and such knights were put about Arthur, as Sir Bandewin of Britain, Sir Kaye, Sir Ulfius, [and] Sir Brastias. All these, with many others, were always about Arthur, day and night, till the feast of Pentecost.

VII. And, at the feast of Pentecost, all manner of men assayed for to pull at the sword that would assay; but none might prevail but Arthur, and pulled it out afore all the lords and commons that were there; wherefore all the commons cried at once, "We will have Arthur unto our king. We will put him no more in delay, for we all see that it is God's will that he shall be our king, and who that holdeth against it we will slay him." And therewithal they kneeled [down all] at once, both rich and poor, and cried Arthur mercy because they had delayed him so long. And Arthur forgave them, and took the sword between both his hands, and offered it upon the altar, where the archbishop was, and so was he made knight of the best man that was there. And so anon was the coronation made, and there was he sworn unto his lords and the commons for to be a true king, to stand with true justice from thenceforth the days of this life; also then he made all the lords that held of the crown to come in and to do him service as they ought to do. And many complaints were made unto Sir Arthur, of great wrongs that were done since the death of King Uther, of many lands that were bereaved [of] lords, knights, ladies, and gentlemen; wherefore King Arthur made the lands for to be given again to them that owned them.

When this was done that the king had stablished all the countries about London, then he let make Six

Kaye seneschal of England, and Sir Baudewin of Britain was made constable, and Sir Ulfius was made chamberlain, and Sir Brastias was made warden to wait upon the North from Trent forwards, for it was that time the most part the King's enemies. But within few years after, Arthur won all the North, Scotland, and all that were under their obeisance. Also Wales, a part of it, held against Arthur, but he overcame them all, as he did the remnant, through the noble prowess of himself and his knights of the Round Table.

VIII. Then the king removed into Wales, and let cry a great feast, that it should be holden at Pentecost after the incoronation of him at the city of Carlion. Unto the feast came King Lot of Lothian and of Orkney, with five hundred knights with him. Also there came to the feast King Uriens of Gore, with four hundred knights with him. Also there came to that feast King Nentres of Garlot, with seven hundred knights with him. Also there came to the feast the King of Scotland, with six hundred knights with him, and he was but a young man. Also there came to the feast a king, that was called the King with the Hundred Knights, but he and his men were passing well beseen at all points. Also there came the King of Carados with five hundred knights. And King Arthur was glad of their coming, for he weened that all the kings and knights had come for great love, and to have done him worship at his feast, wherefore the king made great joy, and sent the kings and knights great presents. But the kings would none receive, but rebuked the messengers shamefully, and said they had no joy to receive no gifts of a beardless boy that *was come of low blood*, and sent him word that they

would none of his gifts, but that they were come to give him gifts with hard swords betwixt the neck and the shoulders, and therefore they came thither. So they told to the messengers plainly, for it was great shame to all them to see such a boy to have a rule of so noble a realm as this land was. With this answer the messengers departed, and told to King Arthur this answer. Wherefore, by the advice of his barons, he took him to a strong tower, with five hundred good men with him, and all the kings aforesaid in a manner laid a siege tofore him, but King Arthur was well victualled.

And within fifteen days there came Merlin among them into the city of Carlion. Then all the kings were passing glad of Merlin, and asked him, "For what cause is that boy, Arthur, made your king?" "Sirs," said Merlin, "I shall tell you the cause, for he is King Uther Pendragon's son, born in wedlock of Igraine, the duke's wife of Tintagil." "Then is he no lawful son," they said all. "That is he," said Merlin, "and, who saith nay, he shall be king, and overcome all his enemies; and, ere he die, he shall be long king of all England, and have under his obeisance Wales, Ireland, and Scotland, and more realms than I will now rehearse." Some of the kings had marvel of Merlin's words, and deemed well that it should be as he said; and some of them laughed him to scorn, as King Lot, and more other called him a witch. But then were they accorded with Merlin, that King Arthur should come out and speak with the kings, and to come safe and go safe; such assurance there was made. So Merlin went unto King Arthur, and told him how he had done, and bade him fear not, but come out boldly and speak with them, and spare

them not, but answer them as their king and chieftain, "for ye shall overcome them all, whether they will or will not."

IX. Then King Arthur came out of his tower, and had under his gown a jesseraunt of double mail, and there went with him the Archbishop of Canterbury, and Sir Baudewin of Britain, and Sir Kaye, and Sir Brastias; these were the men of most worship that were with him. And when they were met, there was no meekness, but stout words on both sides. But always King Arthur answered them and said he would make them to bow, and he lived. Wherefore they departed with wrath, and King Arthur bade keep them well, and they bade the king keep him well. So the king returned him to the tower again, and armed him and all his knights. "What will ye do?" said Merlin to the kings: "ye were better for to stint, for ye shall not here prevail, though ye were ten so many." "Be we well advised to be afraid of a dream-reader?" said King Lot.

With that Merlin vanished away, and came to King Arthur, and bade him set on them fiercely; and in the meanwhile there were three hundred good men of the best that were with the kings, that went straight unto King Arthur, and that comforted him greatly. "Sir," said Merlin to Arthur, "fight not with the sword ye had by miracle, till that ye see ye go unto the worse. Then draw it out and do your best." So forthwithal King Arthur set upon them in their lodging, and Sir Baudewin, Sir Kaye, and Sir Brastias slew on the right hand and on the left hand, that it was marvel, and always King Arthur on horseback laid on with a sword, and did marvellous deeds of arms, *that many of the kings had great joy of his deeds and*

hardiness. Then King Lot brake out on the backside, and the King with the Hundred Knights, and King Carados, and set on Arthur fiercely behind him. With that Sir Arthur turned with his knights, and smote behind and before, and ever Sir Arthur was in the foremost press, till his horse was slain underneath him, and therewith King Lot smote down King Arthur. With that his four knights received him, and set him on horseback. Then he drew his sword Excalibur; but it was so bright in his enemy's eyes, that it gave light like thirty torches, and therewith he put them aback, and slew much people. And then the commons of Carlion arose with clubs and staves, and slew many knights; but all the knights held them together with their knights that were left alive, and so fled and departed. And Merlin came unto Arthur, and counselled him to follow them no further.

X. So, after the feast and tourney, King Arthur drew him unto London, and so by the counsel of Merlin the king let call his barons to counsel; for Merlin had told the king that the six knights that made war upon him would in all haste be awroke on him and on his lands. Wherefore the king asked counsel at them all. They could no counsel give, but said, "They were big enough." "Ye say well," said Arthur; "I thank you for your good courage; but will ye all that love me speak with Merlin? Ye know well that he hath done much for me, and he knoweth many things. And when he is afore you, I would that ye prayed him heartily of his best advice." And all the barons said they would pray him and desire him. So Merlin was sent for, and fair desired of all the barons to give them best counsel. "I shall say you," said Merlin; "I warn you all, your enemies are passing strong for

you, and they are good men of arms as be alive; and by this time they have gotten to them four kings more, and a mighty duke; and unless that our king have more chivalry with him than he may make within the bounds of his own realm, and he fight with them in battle, he shall be overcome and slain." "What were the best to do in this cause?" said all the barons. "I shall tell you," said Merlin, "mine advice. There are two brethren beyond the sea, and they be kings both, and marvellous good men of their hands. The one hight King Ban of Benwick, and that other hight King Bors of Gaul, that is France, and on these two kings warreth a mighty man of men, the King Claudas, and striveth with them for a castle, and great war is betwixt them. But this Claudas is so mighty of goods, whereof he getteth good knights, that he putteth these two kings [the] most part to the worse. Wherefore this is my counsel, that our king and sovereign lord send unto the kings, Ban and Bors, by two trusty knights with letters well devised, that, and they will come and see King Arthur and his court, and so help him in his wars, that he will be sworn unto them to help them in their wars against King Claudas. Now, what say ye unto this counsel?" said Merlin. "This is well counselled," said the king and all the barons.

Right so in all haste there were ordained to go two knights on the message unto the two kings. So were there made letters in the pleasant wise, according unto King Arthur's desire. Ulfus and Brastias were made the messengers, and so rode forth well horsed and well armed, and as the guise was that time, and so passed the sea, and rode toward the city of Benwick. And there besides were eight knights that espied them, and at a straight passage they met with Ulfus and Bras-

tias, and would have taken them prisoners. So they prayed them that they might pass, for they were messengers unto King Ban and Bors, sent from King Arthur. "Therefore," said the eight knights, "ye shall die, or be prisoners, for we be knights of King Claudas." And therewith two of them dressed their spears, and Ulfius and Brastias dressed their spears, and ran together with great randon, and Claudas's knights brake their spears, and thereto held and bare the two knights out of their saddles to the earth, and so left them lying, and rode their ways; and the other six knights rode afore to a passage to meet with them again, and so Ulfius and Brastias smote other two down, and so passed on their ways. And at the fourth passage there met two for two, and both were laid unto the earth; so there was none of the eight knights but he was sore hurt or bruised. And when they came to Benwick, it fortunéd there were both the kings, Ban and Bors. And when it was told the kings that there were come messengers, there were sent unto them two knights of worship, the one hight Lionses, lord of the country of Payarne, and Sir Phariaunce, a worshipful knight. Anon they asked from whence they came, and they said, "From King Arthur of England;" so they took them in their arms, and made great joy each of other. But anon as the two kings wist they were messengers of Arthur's, there was made no tarrying, but forthwith they spake with the knights, and welcomed them in the faithfulest wise, and said they were most welcome unto them before all the kings living. And therewith they kissed the letters, and delivered them. And when Ban and Bors understood the letters, then were they more welcome than they were before; and after the haste of the let-

ters they gave them this answer, that they would fulfil the desire of King Arthur's writing, and [let] Ulfius and Brastias tarry there as long as they would, they should have such cheer as might be made them in those marches. ' Then Ulfius and Brastias told the kings of the adventure at their passage of the eight knights. "Ha! ha!" said Ban and Bors, "they were my good friends. I would I had wist of them; they should not have escaped so." So Ulfius and Brastias had good cheer and great gifts, as much as they might bear away, and had their answer by mouth and by writing, that those two kings would come unto King Arthur in all the haste that they might.

So the two knights rode on afore, and passed the sea, and came to their lord, and told him how they had sped, whereof King Arthur was passing glad. "At what time suppose ye the two kings will be here?" "Sir," said they, "afore Allhallowmas." Then the king let purvey for a great feast, and let cry a great joust. And by Allhallowmas the two kings were come over the sea, with three hundred knights well arrayed, both for the peace and for the war. And King Arthur met with them ten mile out of London, and there was great joy as could be thought or made. And on Allhallowmas, at the great feast sat in the hall the three kings, and Sir Kaye, the seneschal, served in the hall, and Sir Lucas, the butler, that was Duke Corneus's son, and Sir Griflet, that was the son of Cardol; these three knights had the rule of all the service that served the kings. And anon as they had washed and risen, all knights that would joust made them ready. By then they were *ready on horseback*, there were seven hundred knights; *and Arthur, Ban, and Bors, with the Archbishop of*

Canterbury, and Sir Ector, Kaye's father, they were in a place covered with cloth of gold like an hall, with ladies and gentlewomen, for to behold who did best, and thereon to give judgment.

XI. And King Arthur and the two kings let depart the seven hundred knights in two parties; and there were three hundred knights of the realm of Benwick and of Gaul turned on the other side. Then they dressed their shields, and began to couch their spears, many good knights. So Griflet was the first that met with a knight, one Ladinus, and they met so eagerly that all men had wonder; and they so fought that their shields fell to pieces, and horse and man fell to the earth.

And both the French knight and the English knight lay so long, that all men weened that they had been dead. When Lucas, the butler, saw Griflet lie so, he horsed him again anon, and they two did marvellous deeds of arms with many bachelors. Also Sir Kaye came out of an enbushment with five knights with him, and they six smote other six down. But Sir Kaye did that day marvellous deeds of arms, that there was none did so well as he that day. Then there came Ladinus and Grastian, two knights of France, and did passing well, that all men praised them. Then came there Sir Placidus, a good knight, and met with Sir Kaye, and smote him down, horse and man; wherefore Sir Griflet was wroth, and met with Sir Placidus so hard, that horse and man fell to the earth. But when the five knights wist that Sir Kaye had a fall, they were wroth out of wit, and therewith each of them five bare down a knight. When King Arthur and the two kings saw them begin [to] wax wroth on both parts, they leaped on small hackneys,

and let cry that all men should depart unto their lodging; and so they went home and unarmed them, and so to evensong and supper. And, after, the three kings went into a garden, and gave the prize unto Sir Kaye and to Lucas, the butler, and to Sir Griflet; and then they went unto council, and with them Gwenbaus, the brother unto Sir Ban and Bors, a wise clerk, and thither went Ulfus and Brastias, and Merlin; and after they had been in council, they went unto bed.

And on the morn they heard mass, and to dinner, and so to their council, and made many arguments what were best to do. At the last they were concluded that Merlin should go with a token of King Ban (and that was a ring) unto his men, and King Bors's, and Gracian and Placidus should go again and keep their castles and their countries, as King Ban of Benwick and King Bors of Gaul had ordained them; and so passed the sea and came to Benwick. And when the people saw King Ban's ring, and Gracian and Placidus, they were glad, and asked how the kings fared, and made great joy of their welfare and accordance; and, according unto the sovereign lord's desire, the men of war made them ready in all haste possible, so that they were fifteen thousand on horse and foot, and they had great plenty of victual with them, by Merlin's provision. But Gracian and Placidus were left to furnish and garnish the castles, for dread of King Claudas. Right so Merlin passed the sea, well victualled both by water and by land; and, when he came to the sea, he sent home the footmen again, and took no more with him but ten thousand men on horseback, the most part men of arms, and so shipped and passed the sea into England, and landed at Dover; *and through the* *lin he had the host north-*

ward, the priviest way that could be thought, unto the forest of Bedegraine, and there in a valley he lodged them secretly.

Then rode Merlin unto King Arthur and the two kings, and told them how he had sped; whereof they had great marvel, that man on earth might speed so soon, and go and come. So Merlin told them ten thousand were in the forest of Bedegraine, well armed at all points. Then was there no more to say, but to horseback went all the host, as Arthur had afore purveyed. So, with twenty thousand, he passed by night and day. But there was made such an ordinance afore by Merlin, that there should no man of war ride nor go in no country, on this side Trent water, but if he had a token from King Arthur, where through the king's enemies durst not ride, as they did tofore, to espy.

XII. And so within a little space the three kings came unto the castle of Bedegraine, and found there a passing fair fellowship and well beseen, whereof they had great joy; and victual they wanted none. This was the cause of the northern host, that they were reared for the despite and rebuke that the six kings had at Carlion. And those six kings, by their means, gat unto them five other kings, and thus they began to gather their people; and how they swore, that for weal nor woe, they should not leave other till they had destroyed Arthur; and then they made an oath. The first that began the oath was the Duke of Candebenet, that he would bring with him five thousand men of arms, the which were ready on horseback. Then sware King Brandegoris of Stranggore, that he would bring five thousand men of arms on horseback. Then sware King Clariaunce of Northumberland that he would

bring three thousand men of arms. Then sware the King of the Hundred Knights, that was a passing good man and a young, that he would bring four thousand men on horseback. Then there swore King Lot, a passing good knight and Sir Gawaine's father, that he would bring five thousand men of arms on horseback. Also there swore King Uriens, that was Sir Uwayne's father, of the land of Gore, and he would bring six thousand men of arms on horseback. Also there swore King Idres of Cornwall, that he would bring five thousand men of arms on horseback. Also there swore King Cradelmant to bring five thousand men [of arms] on horseback. Also there swore King Agwisaunce of Ireland, to bring five thousand men of arms on horseback. Also there swore King Nentres to bring five thousand men of arms on horseback. Also there swore King Carados to bring five thousand men of arms on horseback. So their whole host was of clean men of arms on horseback fifty thousand, and afoot ten thousand, of good men's bodies.

Then were they soon ready, and mounted upon horse, and sent forth their fore-riders. For these eleven kings, in their ways, laid a siege unto the castle of Bedegraine. And so they departed, and drew toward Arthur, and left few to abide at the siege, for the castle of Bedegraine was holden of King Arthur, and the men that were therein were Arthur's.

XIII. So, by Merlin's advice, there were sent fore-riders to skim the country, and there met with the fore-riders of the North, and made them tell which way the host came, and then they told it to Arthur; and by King Ban and Bors's counsel, they let burn and destroyed all the country afore them, there they *should ride*.

The King with the Hundred Knights dreamed¹ a wonder dream, two nights afore the battle, that there blew a great wind, and blew down their castles and their towns, and after that came a water, and bare it all away. All that heard of the sweven said it was a token of great battle. Then, by the counsel of Merlin, when they wist which way the eleven kings would ride, and lodge that night, at midnight they set upon them as they were in their pavilions. But the scout watch by their host cried, "Lords, at arms, for here be your enemies at your hand!"

XIV. Then King Arthur, and King Ban, and King Bors, with their good and trusty knights, set on them so fiercely, that they made them overthrow their pavilions on their heads; but the eleven kings, by manly prowess of arms, took a fair champaign. But there was slain that morrow-tide ten thousand good men's bodies. And so they had afore them a strong passage, yet were they fifty thousand of hardy men. Then it drew toward day. "Now shall you do, by mine advice," said Merlin unto the three kings; "I would that King Ban and King Bors, with their fellowship of ten thousand men, were put in a wood here beside, in an enbushment, and keep them privy, and that they be laid ere the light of the day come, and that they stir not till ye and your knights have fought with them long. And when it is daylight, dress your battle even afore them and the passage, that they may see all your host; for then they will be the more hardy when they see you but twenty thousand, and cause them to be the gladder to suffer you and your host to come over the passage." All the three kings and the

¹ In text, *mette*, from A. S. *maetan*, to dream.

whole barons said that Merlin said passing well, and it was done anon as Merlin had devised.

So on the morn, when either host saw other, the host of the North was well confronted. Then to Ulfus and Brastias were delivered three thousand men of arms, and they set on them fiercely in the passage, and slew on the right hand and on the left hand, that it was wonder to tell. When that the eleven knights saw that there was so few a fellowship did such deeds of arms, they were ashamed, and set on them again fiercely; and there were Sir Ulfus's horse slain under him, but he did marvellously well on foot. But the Duke Eustace of Candebenet, and King Clariaunce of Northumberland, were alway grievous on Sir Ulfus. Then Brastias saw his fellow fared so withal, he smote the duke with a spear, that horse and man fell down. That saw King Clariaunce, and returned unto Brastias, and either smote other, so that horse and man went to the earth; and so they lay long astonied, and their horses' knees burst to the hard bone. Then came Sir Kaye the seneschal with six fellows with him, and did passing well. With that came the eleven kings, and there was Griflet put to the earth, horse and man; and Lucas, the butler, horse and man, by King Brandegoris, and King Idres, and King Agwisaunce. Then waxed the meddle passing hard on both parties. When Sir Kaye saw Sir Griflet on foot, he rode on King Nentres, and smote him down, and led his horse unto Sir Griflet, and horsed him again. Also Sir Kaye, with the same spear, smote down King Lot, and hurt him passing sore. That saw the King with the Hundred Knights, and ran unto Sir Kaye, and smote him down, and took his horse, and gave him to King Lot, whereof he said gramercy. When

Sir Griflet saw Sir Kaye and Lucas, the butler, on foot, he took a sharp spear, great and square, and rode to Pynell, a good man of arms, and smote horse and man down, and then he took his horse and gave him Sir Kaye. Then King Lot saw King Nentres on foot, he ran unto Melot de la Roche, and smote him down, horse and man, and gave King Nentres the horse, and horsed him again. Also the King of the Hundred Knights saw King Idres on foot, then he ran unto Guimiart de Bloy, and smote him down, horse and man, and gave King Idres the horse, and horsed him again. And King Lot smote down Clariaunce de la Forest Saveage, and gave the horse unto Duke Eustace. And so, when they had horsed the kings again, they drew them all eleven kings together, and said they would be revenged of the damage that they had taken that day.

In the meanwhile came in Sir Ector, with an eager countenance, and found Ulfus and Brastias on foot, in great peril of death, that were foul defiled under [the] horses' feet. Then King Arthur as a lion ran into King Cradelment of North Wales, and smote him through the left side that the horse and the king fell down, and then he took the horse by the rein, and led him unto Ulfus, and said, "Have this horse, mine old friend, for great need hast thou of horse." "Gramercy!" said Ulfus. Then Sir Arthur did so marvellously in arms, that all men had wonder. When the King with the Hundred Knights saw King Cradelment on foot, he ran unto Sir Ector, that was well horsed, Sir Kaye's father, and smote horse and man down, and gave the horse unto the king, and horsed him again. And when King Arthur saw the king ride on Sir Ector's horse, he was wroth, and with his

sword he smote the king on the helm, that a quarter of the helm and shield fell down, and so the sword carved down unto the horse's neck, and so the king and the horse fell down to the ground. Then Sir Kaye came to Sir Morganore, seneschal, with the King of the Hundred Knights, and smote him down, horse and man, and led the horse unto his father, Sir Ector. Then Sir Ector ran unto a knight, that hight Lardans, and smote horse and man down, and led the horse unto Sir Brastias, that great need had of a horse, and was greatly defiled. When Brastias beheld Lucas, the butler, that lay like a dead man under the horses' feet, and ever Sir Griflet did marvellously for to rescue him, and there were always fourteen knights on Sir Lucas, and then Brastias smote one of them on the helm, that it went to the teeth, and he rode to another, and smote him, that the arm flew into the field, then he went to the third, and smote him on the shoulder, that shoulder and arm flew in the field. And when Griflet saw rescue, he smote a knight on the temples, that head and helm went to the earth, and Griflet took the horse of that knight, and led him unto Sir Lucas, and bade him mount upon the horse, and revenge his hurts; for Brastias had slain a knight tofore, and horsed Griflet.

XV. Then Lucas saw King Agwisaunce, that late had slain Moris de la Roche; and Lucas ran to him with a short spear that was great, that he gave him such a fall, that the horse fell down to the earth. Also Lucas found there on foot Bloyas de la Flaundres and Sir Guinas, two hardy knights; and in that woodness that Lucas was in he slew two bachelors, and horsed them again. Then waxed the battle passing hard on both parties; but Arthur was glad that his knights

were horsed again: and then they fought together, that the noise and sound rang by the water and the wood; wherefore King Ban and King Bors made them ready, and dressed their shields and harness, and they were so courageous, that many knights shook and trembled for eagerness.

All this while Lucas, and Guinas, and Briaunt, and Bellias of Flanders, held strong meddle against six kings, that was King Lot, King Nentres, King Brandegoris, King Idres, King Uriens, and King Agwisaunce. So, with the help of Sir Kaye and of Sir Griflet, they held these six kings hard, that unnethe they had any power to defend them. But when Sir Arthur saw the battle would not be ended by no manner, he fared wood as a lion, and stirred his horse here and there, on the right hand and on the left hand, that he stinted not till he had slain twenty knights. Also he wounded King Lot sore on the shoulder, and made him to leave that ground; for Sir Kaye and Griflet did with King Arthur there great deeds of arms. Then Ulfus and Brastias and Sir Ector encountered against the Duke Eustace and King Cradelment and King Cradelmant and King Clariaunce of Northumberland and King Carados, and against the King with the Hundred Knights. So these knights encountered with these kings, that they made them to avoid the ground.

Then King Lot made great dole for his damages and [for] his fellows, and said unto the ten kings, "But if ye will do as I devise, we shall be slain and destroyed. Let me have the King with the Hundred Knights, King Agwisaunce, and King Idres, and the Duke of Candebenet, and we five kings will have fifteen thousand men of arms with us, and we will go apart while ye six kings hold the meddle with twelve

thousand; and we see that ye have foughten with them long, then will we come on fiercely, and else shall we never match them," said King Lot, "but by this mean." So they departed as they here devised, and six kings made their party strong against Arthur, and made great war long.

In the meanwhile brake the enbushment of King Ban and King Bors, and Lionses and Phariaunce had the avant-guard; and they two knights met with King Idres and his fellowship; and there began a great meddle of breaking of spears, and smiting of swords, with slaying of men and horses, and King Idres was near at discomfiture. That saw Agwisaunce, the king, and put Lionses and Phariaunce in point of death, for the Duke of Candebenet came on withal with a great fellowship. So these two knights were in great danger of their lives, that they were fain to return, but always they rescued themselves and their fellowship marvellously.

When King Bors saw those knights put aback, it grieved him sore. Then he came on so fast, that his fellowship seemed as black as Ind. When King Lot had espied King Bors, he knew him well; then he said, "O Jesu! defend us from death and horrible maims; for I see well we be in great peril of death, for I see yonder a king, one of the most worshipfullest men, and one of the best knights in the world, be inclined unto his fellowship." "What is he?" said the King with the Hundred Knights. "It is," said King Lot, "King Bors of Gaul. I marvel how they come into this country without witting of us all." "It was by Merlin's advice," said the knight. "As for him," said King Carados, "I will encounter with King Bors, an ye will rescue me when myster is." "Go on," said

they all; "we will do all that we may." Then King Carados and his host rode on a soft pace till that they came as nigh King Bors as a bow-draught. Then either battle let their horses run as fast as they might; and Bleoberis, that was godson unto King Bors, he bare his chief standard, that was a passing good knight. "Now shall we see," said King Bors, "how these northern Britons can bear the arms." And King Bors encountered with a knight, and smote him through with a spear, that he fell down dead unto the earth, and after drew his sword, and did marvelous deeds of arms, that all parties had great wonder thereof; and his knights failed not, but did their part, and King Carados was smitten to the earth. With that came the King with the Hundred Knights, and rescued King Carados mightily by force of arms, for he was a passing good knight of a king, and but a young man.

XVI. By then came into the field King Ban as fierce as a lion, with bands of green and, thereupon, gold. "Ha! ha!" said King Lot, "we must be discomfited, for yonder I see the most valiant knight of the world, and the man of the most renown. For such two brethren as is King Ban and King Bors are not living; wherefore, we must needs void or die. And but if we avoid manly and wisely, there is but death." When King Ban came into the battle, he came in so fiercely, that the strokes resounded again from the wood and the water; wherefore King Lot wept for pity and dole, that he saw so many good knights take their end. But, through the great force of King Ban, they made both the northern battles that were departed to hurtle together for great dread; and the three kings and their knights slew on ever,

that it was pity to behold that multitude of the people that fled.

But King Lot and King of the Hundred Knights and King Morganore gathered the people together passing knightly, and did great prowess of arms, and held the battle all that day like hard. When the King of the Hundred Knights beheld the great damage that King Ban did, he thrust unto him with his horse, and smote him on high upon the helm a great stroke and astonied him sore. Then King Ban was wroth with him, and followed on him fiercely. The other saw that, and cast up his shield, and spurred his horse forward; but the stroke of King Ban fell down, and carved a cantel off the shield, and the sword slid down by the hauberk behind his back, and cut through the trappere of steel, and the horse even, in two pieces, that the sword felt the earth. Then the King of the Hundred Knights voided the horse lightly, and with his sword he broached the horse of King Ban through and through. With that King Ban voided lightly from the dead horse, and then King Ban smote at the other so eagerly and smote him on the helm that he fell to the earth. Also in that ire he felled King Morganore, and there was great slaughter of good knights and much people.

By then came into the press King Arthur and found King Ban standing among dead men and dead horses, fighting on foot as a wood lion, that there came none nigh him as far as he might reach with his sword, but he caught a grievous buffet, whereof King Arthur had great pity. And Arthur was so bloody that by his shield there might no man know him, for all was blood and brains on his sword. And, as Arthur looked by him, he saw a knight that was passing well

horsed; and therewith Sir Arthur ran to him, and smote him on the helm that his sword went unto his teeth, and the knight sank down to the earth, dead, and anon Arthur took the horse by the rein, and led him unto King Ban, and said, "Fair brother, have this horse, for ye have great myster thereof, and me repenteth sore of your great damage." "It shall be soon revenged," said King Ban; "for I trust in God mine eure is not such, but some of them may sore repent this." "I will well," said Arthur; "for I see your deeds full actual. Nevertheless, I might not come at you at that time." But, when King Ban was mounted on horseback, then there began new battle, the which was sore and hard, and passing great slaughter.

And so, through great force, King Arthur, King Ban, and King Bors made their knights a little to withdraw them; but always the eleven kings with their chivalry never turned back; and so withdrew them to a little wood, and so over a little river, and there they rested them; for on the night they might have no rest on the field. And then the eleven kings and knights put them on a heap all together, as men adread and out of all comfort. But there was no man might pass them, they held them so hard together, both behind and before, that King Arthur had marvel of their deeds of arms, and was passing wroth. "Ah! Sir Arthur," said King Ban and King Bors, "blame them naught, for they do as good men ought to do; for by my faith," said King Ban, "they are the best fighting men, and knights of most prowess, that ever I saw or heard speak of. And those eleven kings are men of great worship; and, if they were longing to you, there were no king under the heaven had such

eleven knights, and of such worship." "I may not love them," said Arthur; "they would destroy me." "That wot we well," said King Ban and King Bors; "for they are your mortal enemies, and that hath been proved aforehand; and this day they have done their part, and that is great pity of their wilfulness."

Then all the eleven kings drew them together; and then said King Lot, "Lords, ye must other ways than ye do, or else the great loss is behind; ye may see what people we have lost, and what good men we lose, because we wait always upon those footmen; and ever, in saving of one of the footmen, we lose ten horsemen for him. Therefore, this is mine advice; let us put our footmen from us, for it is near night. For the noble Arthur will not tarry on the footmen, for they may save themselves; the wood is near hand. And when we horsemen be together, look every one of you kings make such ordinance that none break upon pain of death; and who that seeth any man dress him to flee, lightly that he be slain; for it is better that we slay a coward, than through a coward all we to be slain. How say ye?" said King Lot; "answer me, all ye kings." "It is well said," quoth King Nentres; so said the King of the Hundred Knights; and the same said the King Carados and King Uriens; so did King Idres and King Brandegoris; and so did King Cradelmant and the Duke of Candebenet; the same said King Clariaunce and King Agwisaunce; and sware that they would never fail other, neither for life nor for death; and whoso that fled, but did as they did, should be slain. Then they amended their harness, and righted their shields, and took new spears, and set them on their thighs, and stood still as it had been a plump of wood.

XVII. When Sir Arthur, and King Ban, and Bors beheld them and all their knights, they praised them much for their noble cheer of chivalry, for the hardiest fighters that ever they heard or saw. With that there dressed them a forty noble knights, and said unto the three kings they would break their battle. These were their names:—Lionses, Phariaunce, Ulfius, Brastias, Ector, Kaye, Lucas, the butler, Griflet le Fise de Dieu, and Mariet de la Roche, Gwinas de Bloy, and Briant de la Forest Saveage, Bellaus, Morians, of the Castle [of] Maidens, Flanedrius, of the Castle of Ladies, Annecians, that was King Bors's godson, a noble knight, Ladinas de la Rouse, Emerause, Caulas, and Gracian le Castlein, one Bloise de la Case, and Sir Colgrevaunce de Gorre. All these knights rode on afore with spears on their thighs, and spurred their horses mightily, as the horses might run. And the eleven kings, with part of their knights, rushed with their horses as fast as they might with their spears; and there they did, on both parties, marvellous deeds of arms. So came into the thick of the press Arthur, Ban, and Bors, and slew downright, on both hands, that their horses went in blood up to the fetlocks. But ever the eleven kings and their host were ever in the visage of King Arthur, wherefore Ban and Bors had great marvel, considering the great slaughter that there was; but, at the last, they were driven aback over a little river.

With that came Merlin on a great black horse, and said unto Arthur, "Thou hast never done. Hast thou not done enough? Of threescore thousand this day, hast thou left alive but fifteen thousand, and it is time to say, Ho! For God is wroth with thee that thou wilt never have done; for yonder eleven kings, at this

time, will not be overthrown; but, and thou tarry on them any longer, thy fortune will turn, and they shall increase. And, therefore, withdraw you unto your lodging, and rest you as soon as ye may, and reward your good knights with gold and with silver; for they have well deserved it. There may no riches be too dear for them, for of so few men as ye have, there were never men did more of prowess than they have done to-day, for ye have matched this day with the best fighters of the world." "That is truth," said King Ban and Bors. "Also," said Merlin, "withdraw you where ye list; for this three year I dare undertake they shall not dare you, and by then ye shall hear new tidings." And then Merlin said unto Arthur, "These eleven kings have more on hand than they are aware of; for the Saracens are landed in their countries more than forty thousand, that burn and slay, and have laid siege at the castle Wandesborough, and make great destruction; therefore, dread you not this three year. Also, sir, all the goods that be gotten at this battle, let it be searched; and, when ye have it in your hands, let it be given freely unto these two kings, Ban and Bors, that they may reward their knights withal; and that shall cause strangers to be of better will to do you service at need. Also ye be able to reward your own knights of your own goods, whensoever it liketh you." "It is well said," quoth Arthur, "and as thou hast devised so shall it be done." When it was delivered to Ban and Bors, they gave the goods as freely to their knights as freely as it was given to them.

Then Merlin took his leave of Arthur, and of the two kings, for to go and see his master, Bleise, that dwelt in Northumberland, and so he departed and

came to his master, that was passing glad of his coming; and there he told how Arthur and the two kings had sped at the great battle, and how it was ended, and told the names of every king and knight of worship that was there. And so Bleise wrote the battle, word by word, as Merlin told him; how it began, and by whom; and in likewise how it was ended, and who had the worse; all the battles that were done in Arthur's days, Merlin did his master, Bleise, do write. Also he did do write all the battles that every worthy knight did of Arthur's court.

After this Merlin departed from his master, and came to King Arthur, that was in the castle of Bedegraine, that was one of the castles that stand in the forest of Sherwood. And Merlin was so disguised, that King Arthur knew him not. For he was all befurred in black sheep-skins, and a great pair of boots, a bow and arrows, in a russet gown; and brought wild geese in his hand, and it was on the morn after Candlemas-day; but King Arthur knew him not. "Sir," said Merlin unto the king, "will ye give me a gift?" "Wherefore," said King Arthur, "should I give thee a gift, churl?" "Sir," said Merlin, "ye were better to give me a gift, that is not in your hand, than to lose great riches; for here, in the same place where the great battle was, is great treasure hid in the earth." "Who told thee so, churl?" said Arthur. "Merlin told me so," said he. Then Ulfus and Brastias knew him well enough, and smiled. "Sir," said these two knights, "it is Merlin that so speaketh unto you." Then King Arthur was greatly abashed, and had marvel of Merlin, and so had King Ban and King Bors, and so they had great disport at him.

Then there came word that King Rions of Northern

Wales, made great war upon King Lodegraunce of Camiliard; for the which thing Arthur was wroth, for he loved him well, and hated King Rions, for he was alway against him. So by ordinance of the three kings that were sent home unto Benwick, all they would depart for dread of King Claudas, and Phari-aunce, and Antemes, and Gracian, and Lyonses Pay-arne, with the leaders of those that should keep the king's lands.

XVIII. And then King Arthur, and King Ban, and King Bors departed with their fellowship, a twenty thousand, and came, within six days, into the country of Camiliard, and there rescued King Lodegraunce, and slew there much people of King Rions, unto the number of ten thousand men, and put him to flight. And then had these three kings great cheer of King Lodegraunce, that thanked them of their great goodness that they would revenge him of his enemies. And there had Arthur the first sight of Guenever, the king's daughter of Camiliard, and ever after he loved her. After, they were wedded, as it telleth in the book. So, briefly to make an end, they took their leave to go into their own countries, for King Claudas did great destruction on their lands. "Then," said Arthur, "I will go with you." "Nay," said the kings, "ye shall not at this time, for ye have much to do yet in these lands, therefore we will depart; and, with the great goods that we have gotten in these lands by your gifts, we shall wage good knights, and withstand the King Claudas's malice, for by the grace of God, if we have need, we will send to you for your succour. And if ye have need, send for us, and we will not tarry, by the faith of our bodies." "It shall not need," said Merlin, "that these two kings come again

in the way of war; but I know well King Arthur may not be long from you; for within a year or two, ye shall have great need, and then shall he revenge you on your enemies, as ye have revenged him on his. For these eleven kings shall die all in a day, by the great might and prowess of arms of two valiant knights, as it telleth after. Their names be Balin le Saveage and Balan, his brother, that be marvellous good knights as be any living."

Now turn we to the eleven kings that returned unto a city that hight Sorhaute, which city was within King Uriens's land, and there they refreshed them as well as they might, and made leeches search their wounds, and sorrowed greatly for the death of their people. With that there came a messenger, and told how there was come into their lands people that were lawless, as well as Saracens, a forty thousand, and have burnt and slain all the people that they may come by, without mercy, and have laid siege unto the castle of Wandesborough. "Alas!" said the eleven kings, "here is sorrow upon sorrow; and if we had not warred against Arthur, as we have done, he would soon revenge us; as for King Lodegraunce, he loveth King Arthur better than us; and as for King Rions, he hath enough to do with Lodegraunce, for he hath laid siege unto him." So they consented together to keep all the marches of Cornwall, of Wales, and of the North. So first they put King Idres in the city of Nauntis in Britain, with four thousand men of arms, to watch both the water and the land; also they put in the city of Windesan King Nentres of Garlot, with four thousand knights, to watch both on water and on land.

Also they had, of other men of war, more than eight thousand for to fortify all the fortresses in the marches

of Cornwall; also they put more knights in all the marches of Wales and Scotland, with many good men of arms. And so they kept them together the space of three years, and ever allied them with mighty kings and dukes and lords, and to them fell King Rions of North Wales, which was a mighty man of men, and Nero, that was a mighty man of men. And all this while they furnished them and garnished them of good men of arms, and victual, and all manner of habiliment that pretendeth to the war to avenge them for the battle of Bedegraine, as it telleth in the book of adventure following.

XIX. Then after the departing of King Ban and of King Bors, King Arthur rode unto Carlion, and thither came to him King Lot's wife, of Orkney, in manner of a message; but she was sent thither to espy the court of King Arthur, and she came richly beseen with her four sons, Gawaine, Gaheris, Agravaine, and Gareth, with many other knights and ladies; for she was a passing fair lady, wherefore the king cast great love unto her. So there she rested her a month, and, at the last, departed.

Then the king dreamed a marvellous dream, whereof he was sore adread. And thus was the dream of Arthur. Him thought that there was come into this land griffins and serpents, and him thought they burnt and slew all the people in the land, and then him thought he fought with them, and they did him passing great harm, and wounded him full sore; but, at the last, he slew them. When the king awoke he was passing heavy of his dream; and so, to put it out of thoughts, he made him ready, with many knights, to ride a-hunting. As soon as he was in the forest the king saw a great hart afore him. "This hart will I chase,"

said King Arthur. And so he spurred the horse, and rode after long ; and so, by fine force, oft he was like to have smitten the hart, whereas the king had chased the hart so long, that his horse had lost his breath, and fell down dead. Then a yeoman fetched the king another horse. So the king saw the hart enbushed, and his horse dead, he set him down by a fountain, and there he fell in great thoughts.

And as he sat so there, him thought he heard a noise of hounds to the sum of thirty; and with that the king saw coming toward him the strangest beast that ever he saw or heard of. So the beast went to the well, and drank, and the noise was in the beast's belly like unto the questing of thirty couple hounds; but all the while the beast drank there was no noise in the beast's belly. And therewith the beast departed with a great noise, whereof the king had great marvel; and so he was in a great thought, and therewith he fell asleep. Right so there came a knight afoot unto Arthur, and said, "Knight, full of thought, and sleepy, tell me if thou sawest a strange beast pass this way?" "Such one saw I," said King Arthur, "that is past two mile. What would you with the beast?" said Arthur. "Sir, I have followed that beast a long time, and have killed mine horse, so would God I had another to follow my quest." Right so came one with the king's horse; and when the knight saw the horse, he prayed the king to give him the horse, "for I have followed this quest this twelvemonth, and either I shall achieve him, or bleed of the best blood of my body. Pellinore, that time king, followed the questing beast, and after his death Sir Palomides followed it."

XX. "Sir knight," said the king, "leave that

quest, and suffer me to have it, and I will follow it another twelvemonth." "Ah! fool," said the knight unto Arthur, "thy desire it is in vain; for it shall never be achieved but by me, or my next kin." Therewith he started unto the king's horse, and mounted into the saddle, and said, "Gramercy, this horse is mine own." "Well," said the king, "thou mayest take mine horse by force, but and I might prove thee, whether thou were better on horseback or I." "Well," said the knight, "seek me here when thou wilt, and here nigh this well thou shalt find me." And so passed on his way.

Then the king sat in a study, and bade his men fetch his horse as fast as ever they might. Right so came by him Merlin, like a child of fourteen year of age, and saluted the king, and asked him why he was so pensive and heavy. "I may well be pensive," said the king, "for I have seen the marvellest sight that ever I saw." "That know I well," said Merlin, "as well as thyself, and of all thy thoughts; but thou art but a fool to take thought, for it will not amend thee; also I know what thou art, and who was thy father and thy mother; King Uther Pendragon was thy father, and thy mother Igraine." "That is false," said King Arthur, "how shouldest thou know it? for thou art not so old of years to know my father." "Yes," said Merlin, "I know it better than ye, or any man living." "I will not believe thee," said Arthur, and was wroth with the child.

So departed Merlin, and came again in the likeness of an old man of fourscore year of age, whereof the king was right glad, for he seemed to be right wise. Then said the old man, "Why are ye so sad?" "I may well be heavy," said Arthur, "for many

things; also here was a child, and told me many things that me seemeth he should not know; for he was not of age to know my father." "Yes," said the old man, "the child told you truth, and more would he have told you, and ye would have suffered him; but you have done a thing late wherefore God is displeased with you." "What are ye," said King Arthur, "that tell me these tidings?" "I am Merlin, and I was he in the child's likeness." "Ah!" said King Arthur, "ye are a marvellous man; but I marvel much at thy words, that I must die in battle." "Marvel not," said Merlin, "for it is God's will your body to be punished for your deeds; but I may well be sorry," said Merlin, "for I shall die a shameful death to be put in the earth quick; and ye shall die a worshipful death." As they talked this, came one with the king's horse; and so the king mounted on his horse, and Merlin on another, and so rode unto Carlion. And anon the king asked Ector and Ulfus how he was begotten; and they told him Uther Pendragon was his father, and Queen Igraine his mother. Then he said to Merlin: "I will that my mother be sent for, that I may speak with her; and if she say so herself, then will I believe it." In all haste the queen was sent for; and she came, and brought with her Morgan le Fay, her daughter, that was as fair a lady as any might be; and the king welcomed Igraine in the best manner.

XXI. Right so came Ulfus, and said openly, that the king and all might hear that were feasted that day, "Ye are the falsest lady of the world, and the most traitress unto the king's person." "Beware," said Arthur, "what thou sayest; thou speakest a great word." "I am well ware," said Ulfus, "what I speak; and here is my glove to prove it upon any man

that will say the contrary, that this Queen Igraine is causer of your great damage, and of your great war. For, and she would have uttered it in the life of King Uther Pendragon of the birth of you, and how ye were begotten, ye had never had the mortal wars that ye have had. For the most part of your barons of your realm knew never whose son ye were, nor of whom you were begotten; and she that bare you should have made it known openly, in excusing of her worship and yours, and in likewise to all the realm. Wherefore, I prove her false to God and to you, and to all your realm; and who will say the contrary, I will prove it on his body."

Then spake Igraine, and said, "I am a woman, and I may not fight; but rather than I should be dishonoured, there would some good man take my quarrel. More," she said, "Merlin knoweth well, and ye, Sir Ulfius, how King Uther came to me, in the castle of Tintagil, and wedded me, and, by his commandment, when the child was born, it was delivered unto Merlin, and nourished by him. And so I saw the child never after, nor wot not what is his name; for I knew him never yet." And there Ulfius said to the queen: "Merlin is more to blame than ye." "Well I wot," said the queen, "I bare a child by my lord, King Uther, but I wot not where he is become." Then Merlin took the king by the hand, saying, "This is your mother." And therewith Sir Ector bare witness how he nourished him by Uther's commandment. And therewith King Arthur took his mother, Queen Igraine, in his arms, and kissed her, and either wept upon other. And then the king let make a feast, that *lasted eight days.*

Then on a day there came into the court a squire

on horseback, leading a knight before him, wounded to the death, and told him, how "there was a knight in the forest that hath reared up a pavilion by the well, and hath slain my master, a good knight, and his name was Miles; wherefore, I beseech you, that my master may be buried, and that some knight may revenge my master's death." Then the noise was great of that knight's death, in the court, and every man said his advice. Then came Griflet, that was but a squire, and he was but young, of the age of the King Arthur; so he besought the king, for all the service he had done, to give him the order of knighthood.

XXII. "Thou art full young and tender of age," said Arthur, "for to take so high an order on thee." "Sir," said Griflet, "I beseech you make me knight." "Sir," said Merlin, "it were pity to lose Griflet, for he will be a passing good man when he is of age, abiding with you the term of his life; and if he adventure his body with yonder knight at the fountain, it is in great peril, if ever he come again, for he is one of the best knights of the world, and the strongest man of arms." "Well," said Arthur. So at the desire of Griflet, the king made him knight.

"Now," said Arthur to Griflet, "since that I have made you knight, thou must give me a gift." "What ye will," said Griflet. "Thou shalt promise me, by the faith of thy body, when thou hast jousted with the knight at the fountain, whether it fall ye be on foot or on horseback, that right so ye shall come again unto me without making any more debate." "I will promise you," said Griflet, "as you desire." Then took Griflet his horse in great haste, and dressed his shield, and took a spear in his hand; and so he rode at gallop till he came to the fountain, and there-

by he saw a rich pavilion, and thereby, under a cloth, stood a fair horse, well saddled and bridled; and, on a tree, a shield of divers colours, and a great spear. Then Griflet smote upon the shield with the butt of his spear, that the shield fell down to the ground. With that the knight came out of the pavilion, and said, "Fair knight, why smote ye down my shield?" "For I will joust with you," said Griflet. "It is better ye do not," said the knight, "for ye are but young, and late made knight, and your might is nothing to mine." "As for that," said Griflet, "I will joust with you." "That is me loth," said the knight, "but since I must needs, I will dress me thereto; of whence be ye?" said the knight. "Sir, I am of Arthur's court." So the two knights ran together, that Griflet's spear all to-shivered, and therewithal he smote Griflet through the shield and the left side, and brake the spear, that the truncheon stuck in his body, that horse and knight fell down.

XXIII. Then the knight saw him lie so on the ground, he alighted, and was passing heavy, for he weened he had slain him; and then he unlaced his helm and got him wind. And so, with the truncheon, he set him on his horse, and betook him to God, and said, he had a mighty heart, and if he might live, he would prove a passing good knight. And so Sir Griflet rode to the court, where great dole was made for him; but through good leeches he was healed, and saved. Right so came into the court twelve knights, and were aged men, and they came from the Emperor of Rome, and they asked of Arthur truage for this realm, or else the emperor would destroy him and his land. "Well," said King Arthur, "ye are messengers, therefore ye may say what ye will, or else ye should die

therefore. But this is mine answer. I owe the emperor no truage, nor none will I hold him; but on a fair field I shall give him my truage, that shall be with a sharp spear, or else with a sharp sword, and that shall not be long, by my father's soul, Uther Pendragon." And therewith the messengers departed passingly wroth, and King Arthur as wroth, for in evil time came they then, for the king was passingly wroth for the hurt of Sir Griflet. And so he commanded a privy man of his chamber, that, ere it be day, his best horse and armour, with all that longeth unto his person, that it be without the city ere to-morrow day. Right so, ere to-morrow day, he met with his man and his horse, and so mounted up and dressed his shield, and took his spear, and bade his chamberlain tarry there till he came again.

And so Arthur rode a soft pace till it was day, and then was he ware of three churls chasing Merlin, and would have slain him. Then the king rode unto them, and bade them, "Flee, churls!" Then were they afeared when they saw a knight, and fled. "O Merlin!" said Arthur, "here hadst thou been slain for all thy craft had I not been." "Nay," said Merlin, "not so, for I could save myself, and I would, and thou art more near thy death than I am, for thou goest to the deathward, and God be not thy friend." So as they went thus talking, they came to the fountain, and the rich pavilion there by it. Then King Arthur was ware where sat a knight, armed, in a chair. "Sir knight," said Arthur, "for what cause abidest thou here, — that there may no knight ride this way but if he joust with thee?" said the king; "I rede thee leave that custom," said Arthur. "This custom," said the knight, "have I used, and will use, maugre who saith

nay; and who is grieved with my custom let him amend it that will." "I will amend it," said Arthur. "I shall defend thee," said the knight. Anon he took his horse, and dressed his shield, and took a spear; and they met so hard, either in other's shield, that all to-shivered their spears. Therewith anon Arthur pulled out his sword. "Nay, not so," said the knight; "it is fairer," said the knight, "that we twain run more together with sharp spears." "I will well," said Arthur, "and I had any more spears." "I have enough," said the knight. So there came a squire and brought in good spears, and Arthur chose one, and he another; so they spurred their horses, and came together with all the mights, that either break their spears to their hands. Then Arthur set hand on his sword. "Nay," said the knight, "ye shall do better; ye are a passing good joust as ever I met withal, and once for the love of the high order of knighthood let us joust once again." "I assent me," said Arthur.

Anon there were brought two great spears, and every knight got a spear, and therewith they ran together, that Arthur's spear all to-shivered. But the other knight hit him so hard in midst of the shield, that horse and man fell to the earth, and therewith Arthur was eager, and pulled out his sword, and said, "I will assay thee, sir knight, on foot, for I have lost the honour on horseback." "I will be on horseback," said the knight. Then was Arthur wroth, and dressed his shield toward him with his sword drawn. When the knight saw that, he alight, for him thought no worship to have a knight at such avail, he to be on horseback, and he on foot, and so he alight and dressed his shield unto Arthur, and there began a strong battle, with many great strokes, and so hewed with their

swords, that the cantels flew in the fields, and much blood they bled both, that all the place thereas they fought was over-bled with blood, and thus they fought long, and rested them; and then they went to battle again, and so hurtled together like two rams, that either fell to the earth. So at the last they smote together, that both their swords met even together. But the sword of the knight smote King Arthur's sword in two pieces, wherefore he was heavy. Then said the knight unto Arthur, "Thou art in my danger, whether me list to save thee or slay thee, and but thou yield thee as overcome and recreant, thou shalt die." "As for death," said King Arthur, "welcome be it when it cometh, but to yield me to thee as recreant, I had liefer die than to be so shamed." And therewithal the king leapt unto Pellinore, and took him by the middle, and threw him down, and razed off his helm. When the knight felt that, he was a dread, for he was passing big man of might; and anon he brought Arthur under him and razed off his helm, and would have smitten off his head.

XXIV. Therewithal came Merlin and said, "Knight, hold thy hand, for, and thou slay that knight, thou putttest this realm in the greatest damage that ever was realm, for this knight is a man of more worship than thou wottest of." "Why, who is he?" said the knight. "It is King Arthur." Then would he have slain him for dread of his wrath, and heaved up his sword, and therewith Merlin cast an enchantment to the knight, that he fell to the earth in a great sleep. Then Merlin took up King Arthur, and rode forth on the knight's horse. "Alas!" said Arthur, "what hast thou done, Merlin? Hast thou slain this good knight by thy crafts? There lived not so wor-

shipful a knight as he was. I had liefer than the stint of my land a year that he were alive." "Care ye not," said Merlin, "for he is wholer than ye, for he is but asleep, and will awake within three hours. I told you," said Merlin, "what a knight he was ; here had ye been slain had I not been. Also, there liveth not a better knight than he is one, and he shall hereafter do you right good service, and his name is Pellinore; and he shall have two sons that shall be passing good men; save one, they shall have no fellow of prowess and of good living, and their names shall be Percival of Wales, and Lamorack of Wales ; and he shall tell you the name of your own son that shall be the destruction of all this realm."

XXV. Right so the king and he departed, and went until an hermit that was a good man and a great leech. So the hermit searched all his wounds and gave good salves; so the king was there three days, and then were his wounds well amended that he might ride and go, and so departed. And as they rode Arthur said, "I have no sword." "No force," said Merlin, "hereby is a sword that shall be yours and I may." So they rode till they came to a lake, the which was a fair water and broad; and in the midst of the lake Arthur was aware of an arm clothed in white samite, that held a fair sword in that hand. "Lo," said Merlin, "yonder is the sword that I spake of." With that they saw a damsel going upon the lake. "What damsel is that?" said Arthur. "That is the Lady of the Lake," said Merlin, "and within that lake is a rock, and therein is as fair a place as any is on earth, and richly beseen; and this damsel will come to you anon, and then speak ye fair to her that she will give you that sword." Anon withal

came the damsel unto Arthur and saluted him, and he her again. "Damsel," said Arthur, "what sword is that, that yonder the arm holdeth above the water? I would it were mine, for I have no sword." "Sir Arthur, king," said the damsel, "that sword is mine, and if ye will give me a gift when I ask it you, ye shall have it." "By my faith," said Arthur, "I will give you what gift you will ask." "Well," said the damsel, "go ye into yonder barge, and row yourself to the sword, and take it and scabbard with you; and I will ask my gift when I see my time." So Sir Arthur and Merlin alight, and tied their horses to two trees, and so they went into the ship. And when they came to the sword that the hand held, Sir Arthur took it up by the handles, and took it with him, and the arm and the hand went under the water; and so came unto the land, and rode forth.

[XXVI.] And then Sir Arthur saw a rich pavilion. "What signifieth yonder pavilion?" "That is the knight's pavilion," said Merlin, "that ye fought with last, Sir Pellinore, but he is out; he is not there. He hath ado with a knight of yours, that hight Egglame, and they have fought together, but at the last Egglame fled, and else he had been dead; and he hath chased him even to Carlion, and we shall meet with him anon in the highway." "That is well said," said Arthur, "now have I a sword, and now will I wage battle with him, and be avenged on him." "Sir, ye shall not so," said Merlin, "for the knight is weary of fighting and chasing; so that ye shall have no worship to have ado with him. Also he will not be lightly matched of one knight living, and therefore it is my counsel, let him pass; for he shall do you good service in short time, and his sons after his days. Also ye

shall see that day in short space, ye shall be right glad to give him your sister to wed." "When I see him, I will do as ye advise," said Arthur. Then Sir Arthur looked on the sword, and liked it passing well. "Whether liketh you better," said Merlin, "the sword or the scabbard?" "Me liketh better the sword," said Arthur. "Ye are more unwise," said Merlin, "for the scabbard is worth ten of the swords. For while ye have the scabbard upon you, ye shall never lose no blood, be ye never so sore wounded; therefore keep well the scabbard alway with you."

So they rode unto Carlion, and by the way they met with Sir Pellinore; but Merlin had done such a craft, that Pellinore saw not Arthur, and he passed by without any words. "I marvel," said Arthur, "that the knight would not speak." "Sir," said Merlin, "he saw you not; for, and he had seen you, he had not lightly departed." So they came unto Carlion, whereof his knights were passing glad; and when they heard of his adventures, they marvelled that he would jeopard his person so alone. But all men of worship said it was merry to be under such a chieftain, that would put his person in adventure as other poor knights did.

XXVII. This meanwhile came a messenger from King Rions of North Wales, and king he was of all Ireland, and of many isles, and this was his message, greeting well King Arthur in this manner wise, saying, that King Rions had discomfited and overcome eleven kings, and every each of them did him homage; and that was this — they gave him their beards clean flayed off as much as there was, wherefore the messenger came for King Arthur's beard. For King Rions had purfled a mantle with kings' beards, and there lacked one place of the mantle, wherefore he sent for

his beard, or else he would enter into his lands, and burn and slay, and never leave till he have the head and the beard. "Well," said Arthur, "thou hast said thy message, the which is the most villanous and lewdest message that ever man heard sent unto a king. Also thou mayest see my beard is full young yet to make a purfle of it, but tell thou thy king this: I owe him no homage, nor none of mine elders, but, ere it be long, he shall do me homage on both his knees, or else he shall lose his head, by the faith of my body; for this is the most shamefullest message that ever I heard speak of. I have espied thy king met never yet with worshipful man; but tell him I will have his head without he do me homage." Then the messenger departed. "Now is there any here," said Arthur, "that knoweth King Rions?" Then answered a knight, that hight Naram, "Sir, I know the king well; he is a passing good man of his body, as few be living, and a passing proud man; and, sir, doubt ye not, he will make war on you with a mighty puissance." "Well," said Arthur, "I shall ordain for him in short time."

XXVIII. Then King Arthur let send for all the children that were born on May-day, begotten of lords, and born of ladies. For Merlin told King Arthur that he that should destroy him should be born in May-day; wherefore he sent for them all, upon pain of death. And so there were found many lords' sons, and all were sent unto the king; and so was Mordred sent by King Lot's wife, and all were put in a ship to the sea, and some were four weeks old, and some less. And so, by fortune, the ship drove unto a castle, and was all to-riven and destroyed, the most part, save that Mordred was cast up, and a good man found

him, and nourished him till he was fourteen years old, and then he brought him to the court, as it rehearsed afterward, toward the end, of the death of Arthur. So many lords and barons of this realm were displeased, for their children were so lost; and many put the wit on Merlin, more than on Arthur. So, what for dread, and for love, they held their peace. But when the messenger came to King Rions, then was he wood out of measure, and purveyed him for a great host, as it rehearsed after in the Book of Balin le Saveage, that followeth next after, how by adventure Balin got the sword.

BOOK II

THE BOOK OF SIR BALIN

I. AFTER the death of King Uther Pendragon reigned Arthur his son, the which had great wars in his days, for to get all England into his hand; for there were many kings within the realm of England, and in Wales, Scotland, and in Cornwall. So it befell on a time, when King Arthur was at London, there came a knight and told the king tidings how that the king Rions of North Wales had reared a great number of people, and were entered into the land, and burnt and slew the king's true liege people. "If this be true," said Arthur, "it were great shame unto mine estate, but that he were mightily withstood." "It is truth," said the knight, "for I saw the host myself." "Well," said the king, "let make a cry:" that all the lords, knights, and gentlemen of arms, should draw unto a castle, called Camelot in those days, and there the king would let make a council general, and a great joust.

So when the king was come thither, with all his baronage, and lodged as they seemed best, there was come a damsel, the which was sent on message from the great Lady Lylle of Avelion; and, when she came before King Arthur, she told from whom she came, and how she was sent on message unto him for these causes. Then she let her mantle fall, that was richly furred, and then was she girt with a noble sword,

whereof the king had marvel, and said, "Damsel, for what cause are ye girt with that sword? It beseemeth you not." "Now shall I tell you," said the damsel; "this sword, that I am girt withal, doth me great sorrow and cumbrance, for I may not be delivered of this sword but by a knight, but he must be a passing good man of his hands, and of his deeds, and without villany or treachery and without treason. If I may find such a knight that hath all these virtues, he may draw out this sword out of the sheath. For I have been at King Rions; it was told me, there were passing good knights, and he and all his knights have assayed it, and none can speed."

"This is a great marvel," said Arthur, "if this be sooth. I will myself assay to draw out the sword, not presuming upon myself that I am the best knight, but that I will begin to draw at your sword, in giving example to all the barons, that they shall assay every one after other, when I have assayed it." Then Arthur took the sword by the sheath and by the girdle, and pulled at it eagerly, but the sword would not out. "Sir," said the damsel, "ye need not to pull half so hard; for he that shall pull it out shall do it with little might." "Ye say well," said Arthur; "now assay ye, all my barons; but beware ye be not defiled with shame, treachery, nor guile." "Then it will not avail," said the damsel; "for he must be a clean knight, without villany, and of a gentle strene of father's side and mother's side." Most of all the barons of the Round Table, that were there at that time, assayed all by rowe, but there might none speed. Wherefore the damsel made great sorrow out of measure, and said, "Alas! I weened in this court had been the best knights, without treachery or treason."

"By my faith," said Arthur, "here are good knights as I deem as any be in the world; but their grace is not to help you, wherefore I am displeased."

II. Then fell it so, that time, that there was a poor knight with King Arthur, that had been prisoner with him half a year and more for slaying of a knight, the which was cousin to King Arthur. The name of this knight was called Balin, and by good means of the barons he was delivered out of prison; for he was a good man named of his body, and he was born in Northumberland. And so he went privily into the court and saw this adventure, whereof it raised his heart, and would assay it as other knights did; but for he was poor, and poorly arrayed, he put him not far in press. But in his heart he was fully assured to do as well, if his grace happed him, as any knight that there was. And, as the damsel took her leave of Arthur and all the barons, so departing, this knight, Balin, called unto her, and said, "Damsel, I pray you, of your courtesy, suffer me as well to assay as these lords; though that I be so poorly clothed, in my heart me seemeth I am fully assured as some of these other, and me seemeth in my heart to speed right well." The damsel beheld the poor knight, and saw he was a likely man; but, for his poor arrayment, she thought he should be of no worship without villany or treachery. And then she said unto the knight, "Sir, it needeth not to put me to more pain or labour, for it seemeth not you to speed, thereas other have failed." "Ah! fair damsel," said Balin, "worthiness and good tatches and good deeds are not only in arrayment, but manhood and worship is hid within man's person; and many a worshipful knight is not known unto all people; and therefore worship and hardiness is not in

arrayment." "By God!" said the damsel, "ye say sooth; therefore ye shall assay to do what ye may."

Then Balin took the sword by the girdle and sheath, and drew it out easily; and when he looked on the sword, it pleased him much. Then had the king and all the barons great marvel, that Balin had done that adventure; many knights had great despite of Balin. "Certes," said the damsel, "this is a passing good knight, and the best that ever I found, and most of worship, without treason, treachery, or villany, and many marvels shall he do. Now, gentle and courteous knight, give me the sword again." "Nay," said Balin, "for this sword will I keep, but it be taken from me with force." "Well," said the damsel, "ye are not wise to keep the sword from me, for ye shall slay with the sword the best friend that ye have, and the man that ye most love in the world, and the sword shall be your destruction." "I shall take the adventure," said Balin, "that God will ordain me, but the sword ye shall not have at this time, by the faith of my body." "Ye shall repent it within short time," said the damsel, "for I would have the sword more for your avail than for mine, for I am passing heavy for your sake; for ye will not believe that sword shall be your destruction, and that is great pity." With that the damsel departed, making great sorrow.

Anon, after, Balin sent for his horse and armor, and so would depart from the court, and took his leave of King Arthur. "Nay," said the king, "I suppose ye will not depart so lightly from this fellowship. I suppose ye are displeased, that I have showed you unkindness; blame me the less, for I was *misinformed* against you. But I weened ye had not been

such a knight as ye are of worship and prowess; and if ye will abide in this court among my fellowship I shall so advance you, as ye shall be pleased." "God thank your highness," said Balin; "your bounty and highness may no man praise half to the value; but at this time I must needs depart, beseeching you alway of your good grace." "Truly," said the king, "I am right wroth for your departing; I pray you, fair knight, that ye tarry not long, and ye shall be right welcome to me and to my barons, and I shall amend all amiss that I have done against you." "God thank your great lordship," said Balin, and therewith made him ready to depart. Then the most part of the knights of the Round Table said that Balin did not this adventure all only by might, but by witchcraft.

III. The meanwhile that this knight was making him ready to depart, there came into the court a lady, which hight the Lady of the Lake, and she came on horseback richly beseen, and saluted King Arthur, and there she asked him a gift that he promised her when she gave him the sword. "That is sooth," said Arthur; "a gift I promised you; but I have forgotten the name of my sword that ye gave me." "The name of it," said the lady, "is Excalibur, that is as much to say as 'cut-steel.'" "Ye say well," said the king; "ask what ye will, and ye shall have it, and it lie in my power to give it." "Well," said the lady, "I ask the head of the knight that hath won the sword, or else the damsel's head that brought it; I take no force though I have both their heads, for he slew my brother, a good knight and a true, and that gentlewoman was causer of my father's death." "Truly," said King Arthur, "I may not grant neither of their heads with my worship; therefore ask what

ye will else, and I shall fulfil your desire." "I will ask none other thing," said the lady.

When Balin was ready to depart, he saw the Lady of the Lake, that by her means had slain Balin's mother, and he had sought her three years. And when it was told him that she asked his head of King Arthur, he went to her straight and said, "Evil be you found, ye would have my head, and therefore ye shall lose yours;" and with his sword lightly he smote off her head before King Arthur. "Alas! for shame," said Arthur; "why have you done so? Ye have shamed me and all my court, for this was a lady that I was beholden to, and hither she came under my safe conduct. I shall never forgive you that trespass." "Sir," said Balin, "me forthinketh of your displeasure, for this same lady was the untruest lady living; and by enchantment and sorcery she hath been the destroyer of many good knights, and she was causer that my mother was burnt through her falsehood and treachery." "What cause soever ye had," said Arthur, "ye should have forborne her in my presence; therefore think not the contrary, ye shall repent it, for such another despite had I never in my court afore. Therefore withdraw you out of my court in all the haste that ye may." Then Balin took up the head of the lady, and bare it with him to his hostry, and there he met with his squire, that was sorry he had displeased King Arthur; and so they rode forth out of the town. "Now," said Balin, "we must depart; take thou this head and bear it to my friends, and tell them how I have sped, and tell my friends in Northumberland that my most foe is dead; also tell them how I am out of prison, and what adventure befell *me at the getting of this sword.*" "Alas," said the

squire, "ye are greatly to blame for to displease King Arthur." "As for that," said Balin, "I will hie me with all the haste that I may to meet with Rions, and destroy him, either else or die therefore; and if it may hap me to win him, then will King Arthur be my good and gracious lord." "Where shall I meet with you?" said the squire. "In King Arthur's court," said Balin. So his squire and he departed at that time. Then King Arthur and all the court made great dole, and had shame of the death of the Lady of the Lake. Then the king buried her richly.

IV. At that time there was a knight the which was the king's son of Ireland, and his name was Launceor; the which was an orgulous knight, and counted himself one of the best of the court, and he had great despite at Balin for the achieving of the sword, that any should be accounted more of prowess; and he asked King Arthur, if he would give him leave to ride after Balin, and to revenge the despite that he had done. "Do your best," said Arthur; "I am right wroth with Balin; I would he were quit of the despite that he hath done to me and to my court." Then this Launceor went to his hostry to make him ready: in the meanwhile came Merlin unto the court of King Arthur and there was told him the adventure of the sword, and the death of the Lady of the Lake. "Now shall I say you;" said Merlin, "this same damsel that here standeth, that brought the sword unto your court, I shall tell you the cause of her coming. She was the falsest damsel that liveth." "Say not so," said they; "she hath a brother, a passing good knight of prowess, and a full true man; and this damsel loved another knight, and this good knight, her brother, met with the knight that had her love, and slew him by force of his hands.

When this false damsel understood this, she went to the Lady Lylle of Avelion, and besought her of help to be avenged on her own brother.

V. "And so this Lady Lylle of Avelion took her this sword, that she brought with her, and told there should no man pull it out of the sheath, but if he be one of the best knights of this realm, and he should be hard and full of prowess, and with that sword he should slay her brother. This was the cause that the damsel came into this court." "I know it as well as ye," [said Merlin]; "would God she had not come into this court, but she came never in fellowship of worship to do good, but always great harm, and that knight that hath achieved the sword shall be destroyed by that sword; for the which will be great damage, for there liveth not a knight of more prowess than he is, and he shall do unto you, my lord Arthur, great honour and kindness; and it is great pity he shall not endure but a while, for of his strength and hardiness, I know not his match living." So the knight of Ireland armed him at all points, and dressed his shield on his shoulder, and mounted upon horseback, and took his spear in his hand, and rode after a great pace as much as his horse might go, and within a little space on a mountain he had a sight of Balin, and with a loud voice he cried, "Abide, knight, for ye shall abide, whether ye will or nill, and the shield that is tofore you shall not help." When Balin heard the noise, he turned his horse fiercely, and said, "Fair knight, what will ye with me; will ye joust with me?" "Yea," said the Irish knight, "therefore come I after you." "Peradventure," said Balin, "*it had been better to have held you at home; for many a man weeneth to put his enemy to a rebuke,*

and oft it falleth to himself. Of what court be ye sent from?" said Balin. "I am come from the court of King Arthur," said the knight of Ireland, "that come hither for to revenge the despite ye did this day to King Arthur and to his court."

"Well," said Balin, "I see well I must have ado with you, that me forthinketh for to grieve King Arthur, or any of his court; and your quarrel is full simple," said Balin, "unto me, for the lady that is dead did me great damage, and else would I have been loath as any knight that liveth for to slay a lady." "Make you ready," said the knight Launceor, "and dress you unto me, for that one shall abide in the field." Then they took their spears, and came together as much as their horses might drive, and the Irish knight smote Balin on the shield, that all went shivers of his spear. And Balin hit him through the shield, and the hauberk perished, and so pierced through his body and the horse's croup, and anon turned his horse fiercely, and drew out his sword, and wist not that he had slain him, and then he saw him lie as a dead corpse.

VI. Then he looked by him, and was ware of a damsel that came ride full fast as the horse might ride on a fair palfrey. And when she espied that Launceor was slain, she made sorrow out of measure, and said, "O Balin! two bodies thou hast slain and one heart, and two hearts in one body, and two souls thou hast lost." And therewith she took the sword from her love that lay dead, and fell to the ground in a swoon. And when she arose, she made great dole out of measure, the which sorrow grieved Balin passingly sore, and went unto her for to have taken the sword out of her hand, but she held it so fast, he might not take it out of her hand, unless he should

have hurt her, and suddenly she set the pommel to the ground, and rove herself through the body.

And when Balin espied her deeds, he was passing heavy in his heart, and ashamed that so fair a damsel had destroyed herself for the love of his death. "Alas!" said Balin, "me repenteth sore the death of this knight, for the love of this damsel; for there was much true love betwixt them both." And for sorrow he might not longer behold them, but turned his horse and looked toward a great forest, and there he was ware, by the arms, of his brother Balan; and when they were met, they put off their helms and kissed together, and wept for joy and pity. Then Balan said, "I little weened to have met with you at this sudden adventure; I am right glad of your deliverance out of your dolorous prisonment, for a man told me in the Castle of Fourstones that ye were delivered, and that man had seen you in the court of King Arthur, and therefore I came hither into this country, for here I supposed to find you."

Anon the knight Balin told his brother of his adventure of the sword, and of the death of the Lady of the Lake, and how King Arthur was displeased with him, "wherefore he sent this knight after me that lieth here dead, and the death of this damsel grieveth me full sore." "So doth it me," said Balan; "but ye must take the adventure that God will ordain you." "Truly," said Balin, "I am right heavy that my lord Arthur is displeased with me, for he is the most worshipful knight that reigneth now on earth, and his love will I get, or else I will put my life in adventure; for the King Rions lieth at a siege at castle Tarabil, and thither will we draw, in all haste, to prove our worship and prowess upon him." "I will well," said

Balan, "that we do, and we will help each other as brethren ought to do."

VII. "Now go we hence," said Balin, "and well be we met." The meanwhile as they talked, there came a dwarf from the city of Camelot on horseback, as much as he might, and found the dead bodies; wherefore he made great dole, and pulled out his hair for sorrow, and said, "Which of you knights have done this deed?" "Whereby askest thou it?" said Balan. "For I would wit it," said the dwarf. "It was I," said Balin, "that slew this knight in my defence, for hither he came to chase me, and either I must slay him or he me; and this damsel slew herself for his love, which repenteth me, and for her sake I shall owe all women the better love." "Alas!" said the dwarf, "thou hast done great damage unto thyself; for this knight, that is here dead, was one of the most valiant men that lived, and trust well, Balin, the kin of this knight will chase you through the world till they have slain you." "As for that," said Balin, "I fear not greatly; but I am right heavy that I have displeased my lord, King Arthur, for the death of this knight."

So, as they talked together, there came a king of Cornwall riding, the which hight King Mark. And when he saw these two bodies dead, and understood how they were dead by the two knights abovesaid, then made the king great sorrow for the true love that was betwixt them, and said, "I will not depart till I have on this earth made a tomb." And there he pitched his pavilions, and sought through all the country to find a tomb. And in a church they found one was fair and rich, and then the king let put them both in the earth, and put the tomb upon them, and wrote

the names of them on the tomb, how here lieth Launceor, the king's son of Ireland, that at his own request was slain by the hands of Balin; and how his lady Colombe slew herself with her love's sword for dole and sorrow.

VIII. The meanwhile as this was a-doing, in came Merlin to King Mark, [and,] seeing all his doing, said, "Here shall be in this same place the greatest battle betwixt two knights that was or ever shall be, and the truest lovers, and yet none of them shall slay other." And there Merlin wrote their names upon the tomb with letters of gold, that should fight in that place, whose names were Launcelot de Lake, and Tristram. "Thou art a marvellous man," said King Mark unto Merlin, "that speakest of such marvels; thou art a boistous man, and an unlikely, to tell of such deeds. What is thy name?" said King Mark. "At this time," said Merlin, "I will not tell; but at that time when Sir Tristram is taken with his sovereign lady, then ye shall hear and know my name, and at that time ye shall hear tidings that shall not please you. Then," said Merlin to Balin, "thou hast done thyself great hurt, because that thou savest not this lady that slew herself, that might have saved her if thou wouldest." "By the faith of my body," said Balin, "I might not save her, for she slew herself suddenly." "Me repenteth," said Merlin; "because of the death of that lady. Thou shalt strike a stroke most dolorous that ever man stroke, except the stroke of our Lord; for thou shalt hurt the truest knight, and the man of most worship, that now liveth, and through that stroke three kingdoms shall be in great poverty, misery, and wretchedness twelve year, and the knight shall not be whole of that wound many years." Then Merlin

took his leave of Balin. And Balin said, "If I wist it were sooth that ye say, I should do such perilous deed as that I would slay myself to make thee a liar." Therewith Merlin vanished away suddenly.

And then Balin and his brother took their leave of King Mark. "First," said the king, "tell me your name." "Sir," said Balan, "ye may see he beareth two swords; thereby ye may call him the Knight with the Two Swords." And so departed King Mark unto Camelot to King Arthur; and Balin took the way toward King Rions, and as they rode together they met with Merlin disguised, but they knew him not. "Whither ride you?" said Merlin. "We have little to do," said the two knights, "to tell thee." "But what is thy name?" said Balan. "At this time," said Merlin, "I will not tell it thee." "It is evil seen," said the knights, "that thou art a true man, that thou wilt not tell thy name." "As for that," said Merlin, "be it as it may, I can tell you wherefore ye ride this way; for to meet King Rions, but it will not avail you, without ye have my counsel." "Ah!" said Balin, "ye are Merlin; we will be ruled by your counsel." "Come on," said Merlin; "ye shall have great worship, and look that ye do knightly; for ye shall have great need." "As for that," said Balin, "dread ye not; we will do what we may."

IX. Then Merlin lodged them in a wood amongst leaves, beside the highway, and took off the bridles of their horses, and put them to grass, and laid them down to rest them till it was nigh midnight. Then Merlin bade them rise and make them ready, for the king was nigh them, that was stolen away from his host, with a threescore horses of his best knights; and twenty of them rode before to warn the Lady de

Vance that the king was coming, for that night King Rions should lodge with her. "Which is the king?" said Balin. "Abide," said Merlin; "here in a straight way ye shall meet with him." And therewith he showed Balin and his brother where he rode. Anon Balin and his brother met with the king, and smote him down, and wounded him fiercely, and laid him to the ground; and there they slew on the right hand and on the left hand, and slew more than forty of his men, and the remnant fled. Then went they again to King Rions, and would have slain him, had he not yielded him unto their grace. Then said he thus, "Knights, full prowess, slay me not; for by my life ye may win, and by my death ye shall win nothing." Then said these two knights, "Ye say sooth and truth," and so laid him on an horse-litter.

With that Merlin was vanished, and came to King Arthur aforehand, and told him how his most enemy was taken and discomfited. "By whom?" said King Arthur. "By two knights," said Merlin, "that would please your lordship, and to-morrow ye shall know what knights they are." Anon, after, came the Knight with the Two Swords, and Balan, his brother, and brought with them King Rions of North Wales, and there delivered him to the porters, and charged them with him, and so they two returned again in the dawning of the day. King Arthur came then to King Rions and said, "Sir king, ye are welcome; by what adventure came ye hither?" "Sir," said King Rions, "I came hither by an hard adventure." "Who won you?" said King Arthur. "Sir," said the king, "the Knight with the Two Swords and his brother, which are two marvellous knights of prowess." "I know them not," said Arthur; "but much I am beholding to

them." "Ah!" said Merlin, "I shall tell you it is Balin that achieved the sword, and his brother, Balan, a good knight; there liveth not a better of prowess and of worthiness, and it shall be the greatest dole of him that ever I knew of knight, for he shall not long endure." "Alas!" said King Arthur, "that is great pity; for I am much beholding unto him, and I have ill deserved it unto him for his kindness." "Nay," said Merlin, "he shall do much more for you, and that shall ye know in haste. But, sir, are ye purveyed?" said Merlin; "for to-morn the host of Nero, King Rions's brother, will set on you ere noon with a great host, and therefore make you ready, for I will depart from you."

X. Then King Arthur made ready his host in ten battles; and Nero was ready in the field, afore the Castle Tarabil, with a great host; and he had ten battles, with many more people than Arthur had. Then Nero had the vanguard with the most party of his people, and Merlin came to King Lot of the Isle of the Orkney, and held him with a tale of prophecy, till Nero and his people were destroyed. And there Sir Kaye, the seneschal, did passingly well, that the days of his life the worship went never from him; and Sir Hervis de Revel did marvellous deeds with King Arthur. And King Arthur slew that day twenty knights, and maimed forty. At that time came in the Knight with the Two Swords, and his brother, Balan; but they two did so marvellously, that the king and all the knights marvelled of them, and all that beheld them said, that they were sent from heaven as angels, or devils from hell; and King Arthur said himself, that they were the best knights that ever he saw; for they gave such strokes that all

men had wonder of them. In the meanwhile came one to King Lot and told him, while he tarried there, Nero was destroyed and slain with all his people. "Alas!" said King Lot, "I am ashamed, for, by my default, there is many a worshipful man slain; for, and we had been together, there had been none host under heaven that had been able for to have matched with us. This faylor, with his prophecy, hath mocked me." All that did Merlin; for he knew well that, and King Lot had been with his body there at the first battle, King Arthur had been slain and all his people destroyed. And well Merlin knew that one of the kings should be dead that day, and loth was Merlin that any of them both should be slain; but of the twain he had liefer King Lot had been slain than King Arthur.

"Now what is best to do?" said King Lot of Orkney, "whether is me better for to treat with King Arthur, or to fight, for the greater party of our people are slain and destroyed?" "Sir," said a knight, "set on Arthur; for they are weary and forfoughten, and we be fresh." "As for me," said King Lot, "I would that every knight would do his part as I will do mine." And then they advanced banners, and smote together, and all to-shivered their spears; and Arthur's knights, with the help of the Knight of the Two Swords, and his brother, Balan, put King Lot and his host to the worse. But always King Lot held him in the foremost front, and did marvellous deeds of arms; for all his host was borne up by his hands, for he abode all knights. Alas! he might not endure, the which was great pity that so worthy a knight as he was should be overmatched, that of late time afore had been a knight of King Arthur's, and wedded the sis-

ter of King Arthur. And there was there a knight, that was called the Knight with the Strange Beast, and at that time his right name was called Pellinore, the which was a good man of prowess; and he smote a mighty stroke at King Lot as he fought with all his enemies, and he failed of his stroke, and smote the horse's neck, that he fell to the ground with King Lot. And therewith anon Pellinore smote him a great stroke through the helm and head unto the brows; and then all the host of Orkney fled for the death of King Lot, and there was slain many mother's sons. But King Pellinore bare the wit of the death of King Lot; wherefore Sir Gawaine revenged the death of his father the tenth year after he was made knight, and slew King Pellinore with his own hands. Also there was slain at that battle twelve kings on the side of King Lot with Nero, and all were buried in the church of St. Steven's in Camelot; and the remnant of knights, and of other, were buried in a great rock.

XI. So, at the interment, came King Lot's wife, Morgause, with her four sons, Gawaine, Agravaine, Gaheris, and Gareth. Also there came thither King Uriens, Sir Ewaine's father, and Morgan le Fay, his wife, that was King Arthur's sister; all these came to the interment. But of all these twelve kings, King Arthur let make the tomb of King Lot passing richly, and made his tomb by his own. And then King Arthur let make twelve images of laton and copper, and overgilt it with gold, in the sign of twelve kings; and each one of them held a taper of wax, that burnt day and night. And King Arthur was made in sign of a figure standing above them, with a sword drawn in his hand; and all the twelve figures had countenances like unto men that were overcome. All this made

Merlin by his subtle craft, and there he told the king, "When I am dead these tapers shall burn no longer; and, soon after, the adventures of the Saint Grail shall come among you, and be achieved." Also he told Arthur, how Balin, the worshipful knight, shall give the dolorous stroke, whereof shall fall great vengeance. "Oh, where is Balin, and Balan, and Pellinore?" said King Arthur.

"As for Pellinore," said Merlin, "he will meet with you soon; and as for Balin he will not be long from you. But the other brother will depart; ye shall see him no more." "By my faith," said Arthur, "they are two marvellous knights, and namely Balin passeth of prowess of any knight that ever I found; for much beholding I am unto him. Would God he would abide with me." "Sir," said Merlin, "look ye keep well the scabbard of Excalibur; for ye shall lose no blood while ye have the scabbard upon you, though ye have as many wounds upon you as ye may have." So after, for great trust, Arthur betook the scabbard to Morgan le Fay, his sister; and she loved another knight better than her husband, King Uriens, or King Arthur. And she would have had Arthur, her brother, slain. And, therefore, she let make another scabbard like it by enchantment, and gave the scabbard [of] Excalibur to her love, and the knight's name was called Accolon, that after had near slain King Arthur. After this Merlin told unto King Arthur of the prophecy that there should be a great battle beside Salisbury, and Mordred, his own son, should be against him. Also he told him, that Basdemegus was his cousin, and german unto King Uriens.

XII. Within a day or two King Arthur was somewhat sick, and he let pitch his pavilion in a meadow,

and there he laid him down on a pallet to sleep, but he might have no rest. Right so he heard a great noise of an horse; and therewith the king looked out at the porch of the pavilion, and saw a knight coming even by him making great dole. "Abide, fair sir," said Arthur, "and tell me wherefore thou makest this sorrow." "Ye may little amend me," said the knight, and so passed forth to the castle of Meliot. Anon after there came Balin; and, when he saw King Arthur, anon he alighted off his horse, and came to the king on foot, and saluted him. "By my head," said Arthur, "ye be welcome, Sir. Right now came riding this way a knight making great mourn, for what cause I cannot tell; wherefore, I would desire you, of your courtesy and of your gentleness, to fetch again that knight either by force or else by his good will." "I will do more for your lordship than that," said Balin, and so he rode more than a pace, and found the knight with a damsel in a forest, and said, "Sir knight, ye must come with me unto King Arthur, for to tell him of your sorrow." "That will I not," said the knight; "for it will scathe me greatly, and now do you none avail." "Sir," said Balin, "I pray you make you ready; for ye must go with me, or else I must fight with you, and bring you by force, and that were me loth to do." "Will ye be my warrant," said the knight, "and I go with you?" "Yea," said Balin, "or else I will die therefore." And so he made him ready to go with Balin, and left the damsel still. And, as they were even afore King Arthur's pavilion, there came one invisible, and smote this knight that went with Balin throughout the body with a spear.

"Alas!" said the knight, "I am slain under your

conduct with a knight called Garlon; therefore take my horse, that is better than yours, and ride to the damsel, and follow the quest that I was in, as she will lead you, and revenge my death when ye may." "That shall I do," said Balin, "and that I make a vow unto knighthood." And so he departed from this knight with great sorrow. So King Arthur let bury this knight richly, and made a mention on the tomb how there was slain Herleus le Berbeus, and by whom the treachery was done, the knight Garlon. But ever the damsel bare the truncheon of the spear with her that Sir Herleus was slain withal.

XIII. So Balin and the damsel rode into a forest, and there met with a knight that had been a-hunting; and that knight asked Balin for what cause he made so great sorrow. "Me list not to tell you," said Balin. "Now," said the knight, "and I were armed as ye be, I would fight with you." "That should little need," said Balin; "I am not afeared to tell you;" and told him all the cause how it was. "Ah!" said the knight, "is this all? Here I ensure you, by the faith of my body, never to depart from you as long as my life lasteth."

And so they went to the hostry and armed them, and so rode forth with Balin; and as they came by an hermitage, even by a churchyard, there came the knight Garlon invisible, and smote this knight, Perin de Mountbeliard, through the body with a spear. "Alas!" said the knight, "I am slain by this traitor knight that rideth invisible." "Alas!" said Balin, "it is not the first despite that he hath done me." And there the hermit and Balin buried the knight under a rich stone and a tomb royal; and, on the *morn*, they found letters of gold written, how Sir

Gawaine shall revenge his father's death, King Lot, on the King Pellinore.

Anon, after this, Balin and the damsel rode till they came to a castle; and there Balin alighted, and he and the damsel weened to go into the castle. And anon, as Balin came within the castle's gate, the portcullis fell down at his back; and there fell many men about the damsel, and would have slain her. When Balin saw that, he was sore aggrieved, for he might not help the damsel; then he went up into the tower, and leaped over walls into the ditch, and hurt him not. And anon he pulled out his sword, and would have fought with them. And they all said nay, they would not fight with him, for they did nothing but the old custom of the castle, and told him how their lady was sick, and had lain many years, and she might not be whole, but if she had a silver dish full of blood of a clean maid and a king's daughter, "and, therefore, the custom of this castle is, there shall no damsel pass this way but she shall bleed of her blood a silver dish full." "Well," said Balin, "she shall bleed as much as she may bleed; but I will not lose the life of her while my life lasteth." And so Balin made her to bleed by her good will; but her blood helped not the lady. And so he and she rested there all night, and had there right good cheer; and, on the morn, they passed on their way. And as it telleth after, in the Saint Grail, that Sir Percival's sister helped that lady with her blood, whereof she was dead.

XIV. Then they rode three or four days, and never met with adventure; and by hap they were lodged with a gentleman that was a rich man, and well at ease. And, as they sat at their supper, Balin heard one complain grievously by him in a chair. "What

is this noise?" said Balin. "Forsooth," said his host, "I will tell you. I was but late at a jousting, and there I jousted with a knight, that is brother unto King Pellam, and twice smote I him down; and then he promised to quit me on my best friend, and so he wounded my son, that cannot be whole till I have of that knight's blood: and he rideth always invisible, but I know not his name." "Ah!" said Balin, "I know that knight, his name is Garlon; he hath slain two knights of mine in the same manner, therefore I had liefer meet with that knight than all the gold in this realm, for the despite he hath done me." "Well," said his host, "I shall tell you, King Pellam of Listineise hath made do cry, in all this country, a great feast that shall be within these twenty days, and no knight may come there but if he bring his wife with him; and that knight, your enemy and mine, ye shall see that day." "Then I behote you," said Balin, "part of his blood to heal your son withal." "We will be forward to-morrow," said his host.

So, on the morn, they rode all three toward Pellam, and had fifteen days' journey ere they came thither; and that same day began the great feast, and they alighted and stabled their horses, and went into the castle. But Balin's host might not be let in, because he had no lady. Then Balin was well received, and brought unto a chamber, and unarmed him; and there were brought him robes to his pleasure, and would have had Balin leave his sword behind him. "Nay," said Balin, "that do I not; for it is the custom of my country a knight always to keep his weapon with him, and that custom will I keep, or else I will depart as I came." Then they gave him leave to *wear his sword*. And so he went unto the castle, and

was set among knights of worship, and his lady afore him. Soon Balin asked a knight, "Is there not a knight in this court whose name is Garlon?" "Yonder he goeth," said the knight, "he with the black face. He is the marvaillest knight that is now living, for he destroyeth many good knights, for he goeth invisible." "Ah! well," said Balin, "is that he?" Then Balin advised him long, "If I slay him here I shall not escape, and if I leave him now, peradventure I shall never meet with him again at such a steven, and much harm he will do, and he live."

Therewith this Garlon espied that this Balin beheld him, and then he came and smote Balin on the face with the back of his hand, and said, "Knight, why beholdest thou me so? For shame! Therefore eat thy meat, and do that thou came for." "Thou sayest sooth," said Balin; "this is not the first despite that thou hast done me; and, therefore, I will do that I came for;" and rose up fiercely, and cleaved his head to the shoulders. "Give me the truncheon," said Balin to his lady, "wherewith he slew your knight." Anon she gave it him, for alway she bare the truncheon with her. And therewith Balin smote him through the body, and said openly, "With that truncheon thou hast slain a good knight, and now it sticketh in thy body." And then Balin called unto him his host, saying, "Now may ye fetch blood enough to heal your son withal."

XV. Anon all the knights rose up from the table for to set on Balin; and King Pellam himself arose up fiercely, and said, "Knight, hast thou slain my brother? Thou shalt die, therefore, ere thou depart." "Well," said Balin, "do it yourself." "Yes," said King Pellam, "there shall no man have ado with thee

but myself, for the love of my brother." Then King Pellam caught in his hand a grim weapon, and smote eagerly at Balin; but Balin put his sword betwixt his head and the stroke, and therewith his sword burst in sunder. And when Balin was weaponless, he ran into a chamber for to seek some weapon, and so from chamber to chamber, and no weapon could he find; and always King Pellam after him, and at the last he entered into a chamber that was marvellously well dight and richly, and a bed arrayed with cloth of gold, the richest that might be thought, and one lying therein, and thereby stood a table of clean gold, with four pillars of silver that bare up the table, and upon the table stood a marvellous spear, strangely wrought. And when Balin saw that spear, he got it in his hand, and turned him to King Pellam, and smote him passingly sore with that spear, that King Pellam fell down in a swoon; and therewith the castle roof and walls brake and fell to the earth, and Balin fell down, so that he might not stir foot nor hand; and so the most part of the castle that was fallen down, through that dolorous stroke, lay upon King Pellam and Balin three days.

XVI. Then Merlin came thither and took up Balin, and got him a good horse, for his was dead, and bade him ride out of that country. "I would have my damsel," said Balin. "Lo," said Merlin, "where she lieth dead." And King Pellam lay so many years sore wounded, and might never be whole till Galahad, the Haute Prince, healed him in the quest of the Saint Grail; for in that place was part of the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, that Joseph of Arimathea brought into this land, and there himself lay in that rich bed. And that was the same spear that Longius

smote our Lord to the heart; and King Pellam was nigh of Joseph's kin, and that was the most worshipful man that lived in those days; and great pity it was of his hurt, for through that stroke turned to great dole, tray, and tene. Then departed Balin from Merlin, and said, "In this world we meet never no more." So he rode forth through the fair countries and cities, and found the people dead, slain on every side. And all that were alive cried, "O Balin! thou has caused great damage in these countries; for [through] the dolorous stroke thou gavest unto King Pellam three countries are destroyed. And doubt not but the vengeance will fall on thee at the last." When Balin was past those countries, he was passing fain.

So he rode eight days ere he met with adventure, and at the last he came into a fair forest, in a valley, and was ware of a tower, and there beside he saw a great horse of war tied to a tree, and there beside sat a fair knight on the ground, and made great mourning, and he was a likely man, and a well made. Balin said, "God save you, why be ye so heavy? Tell me, and I will amend it, and I may, to my power." "Sir knight," said he, "again thou doest me great grief; for I was in merry thoughts, and now thou putttest me to more pain." Balin went a little from him, and looked on his horse. Then Balin heard him say thus, "Ah! fair lady, why have ye broken my promise, for thou promisest me to meet me here by noon, and I may curse thee that ever ye gave me this sword; for with this sword I slay myself," and pulled it out, and therewith Balin started unto him, and took him by the hand. "Let go my hand," said the knight, "or else I shall slay thee." "That shall not need," said Balin, "for I shall promise you my help to get you

your lady, and you will tell me where she is." "What is your name?" said the knight. "My name is Balin le Savage." "Ah! sir, I know you well enough; you are the Knight with the Two Swords, and the man of most prowess of your hands living." "What is your name?" said Balin. "My name is Garnish of the Mount, a poor man's son, but, by my prowess and hardiness, a duke hath made me knight, and gave me lands. His name is Duke Hermel, and his daughter is she that I love, and she me, as I deemed." "How far is she hence?" said Balin. "But six miles," said the knight. "Now ride we hence," said these two knights. So they rode more than a pace till that they came to a fair castle, well walled and ditched. "I will into the castle," said Balin, "and look if she be there." So he went in, and searched from chamber to chamber, and found her bed, but she was not there. Then Balin looked into a fair little garden, and, under a laurel-tree, he saw her with the foulest knight that ever he saw, and she a fair lady. Then Balin went through all the chambers again, and told the knight how he found her, and so brought him to the place.

XVII. And when Garnish beheld her, for pure sorrow his mouth and nose burst out on bleeding, and with his sword he smote off both their heads; and then he made sorrow out of measure, and said, "Oh! Balin, much sorrow hast thou brought unto me; for hadst thou not showed me that sight, I should have passed my sorrow." "Forsooth," said Balin, "I did it to this intent, that it should better thy courage, and that ye might see and know her falsehood, and to cause you to leave love of such a lady. God knoweth I did none other but as I would you did to me."

"Alas!" said Garnish, "now is my sorrow double that I may not endure; now have I slain that I most loved in all my life." And therewith suddenly he rove himself on his own sword unto the hilts.

When Balin saw that, he dressed him thenceward, lest folk would say he had slain them; and so he rode forth, and within three days he came by a cross, and thereon were letters of gold written, that said, "It is not for no knight alone to ride toward this castle." Then saw he an old hoary gentleman coming toward him, that said, "Balin le Saveage, thou passeth thy bands to come this way; therefore turn again, and it will avail thee." And he vanished away anon, and so he heard a horn blow, as it had been the death of a beast. "That blast," said Balin, "is blown for me; for I am the prize, and yet am I not dead." Anon withal he saw an hundred ladies and many knights that welcomed him with fair semblance, and made him passing good cheer unto his sight, and led him into the castle, and there was dancing and minstrelsy, and all manner of joy. Then the chief lady of the castle said, "Knight with the Two Swords, ye must have ado and joust with a knight hereby that keepeth an island; for there may no man pass this way, but he must joust, ere he pass." "That is an unhappy custom," said Balin, "that a knight may not pass this way, but if he joust." "Ye shall have ado but with one knight," said the lady. "Well," said Balin, "since I shall thereto, I am ready; but travelling men are oft weary, and their horses too. But though my horse be weary, my heart is not weary; I would be fain, there my death should be." "Sir," said a knight to Balin, "me thinketh your shield is not good; I will lend you a bigger thereof, I pray you."

And so he took the shield that was unknown, and left his own, and so rode unto the island, and put him and his horse in a great boat. And when he came on the other side he met with a damsel, and she said, "O knight Balin, why have you left your own shield; alas! ye have put yourself in great danger: for by your shield you should have been known. It is great pity of you as ever was of knight, for of thy prowess and hardiness thou hast no fellow living." "Me repenteth," said Balin, "that ever I came within this country, but I may not turn now again for shame. And what adventure shall fall to me, be it life or death, I will take the adventure that shall come to me." And then he looked on his armour, and understood he was well armed, and therewith blessed him, and mounted upon his horse.

XVIII. Then afore him he saw come riding out of a castle, a knight, and his horse trapped all red, and himself in the same colour. When this knight in the red beheld Balin, him thought it should be his brother Balin, because of his two swords; but because he knew not his shield, he deemed it was not he. And so they aventred their spears, and came marvellously fast together, and they smote other in the shields; but their spears and their course were so big that it bare down horse and man, that they lay both in a swoon; but Balin was bruised sore with the fall of his horse, for he was weary of travel. And Balan was the first that rose on foot, and drew his sword, and went toward Balin, and he arose and went against him, but Balan smote Balin first, and he put up his shield, and smote him through the shield, and tamed his helm; then Balin smote him again with that unhappy sword, and well nigh had felled his brother Balan; and so they

fought there together till their breaths failed. Then Balin looked up to the castle, and saw the towers stand full of ladies. So they went unto battle again, and wounded each other dolefully; and then they breathed oft-times, and so went unto battle, that all the place thereas they fought was blood-red. And, at that time, there was none of them both but they had either smitten other seven great wounds; so that the least of them might have been the death of the mightiest giant in the world.

Then they went to battle again so marvellously, that doubt it was to hear of that battle; for the great bloodshedding, and their hauberks unnailed, that naked they were on every side. At last Balan, the younger brother, withdrew him a little, and laid him down. Then said Balin le Saveage, "What knight art thou, for ere now I found never no knight that matched me?" "My name is," said he, "Balan, brother unto the good knight Balin." "Alas!" said Balin, "that ever I should see this day!" And therewith he fell backward in a swoon.

Then Balan yede on all four feet and hands, and put off the helm of his brother, and might not know him by the visage, it was so full hewn and bled. But when he awoke, he said, "O Balan, my brother, thou hast slain me, and I thee, wherefore all the wide world shall speak of us both." "Alas!" said Balan, "that ever I saw this day, that through mishap I might not know you; for I espied well your two swords, but because ye had another shield, I deemed ye had been another knight." "Alas!" said Balin, "all that made an unhappy knight in the castle, for he caused me to leave mine own shield to our both's destruction; and if I might live I would destroy that

castle for ill customs." "That were well done," said Balan, "for I had never grace to depart from them, since that I came hither, for here it happed me to slay a knight that kept this island, and since might I never depart, and no more should ye, brother, and ye might have slain me, as ye have, and escaped yourself with the life."

Right so came the lady of the tower with four knights and six ladies, and six yeomen unto them, and there she heard how they made their mourn either to other, and said, "We came both out of one tomb, that is to say of one mother, and so shall we lie both in one pit." So Balan prayed the lady of her gentleness, for his true service, that she would bury them both in that place there the battle was done. And she granted them, with weeping, it should be done richly, in the best manner. "Now will ye send for a priest, that we may receive our sacrament and receive the blessed body of our Lord Jesu Christ." "Yea," said the lady, "it shall be done." And so she sent for a priest, and gave them their rites. "Now," said Balin, "when we are buried in one tomb, and the mention made over us how two brethren slew each other, there will never good knight, nor good man, see our tomb, but they will pray for our souls." And so all the ladies and gentlewomen wept for pity.

Then anon Balan died, but Balin died not till the midnight after, and so were they buried both; and the lady let make a mention of Balan, how he was there slain by his brother's hands, but she knew not Balin's name.

XIX. In the morn came Merlin, and let write *Balin's name* on the tomb with letters of gold, that "*Here lieth Balin le Saveage, that was the Knight with*

the Two Swords, and he that smote the dolorous stroke." Also Merlin let make there a bed, that there should never man lie therein but he went out of his wit; yet Launcelot de Lake fordid that bed through his noblesse. And anon, after Balin was dead, Merlin took his sword, and took off the pommel, and set on another pommel. So Merlin bade a knight that stood afore him to handle that sword, and he assayed, and he might not handle it. Then Merlin laughed. "Why laugh ye?" said the knight. "This is the cause," said Merlin; "there shall never man handle this sword but the best knight of the world, and that shall be Sir Launcelot, or else Galahad, his son; and Launcelot, with this sword, shall slay the man that in this world he loved best, that shall be Sir Gawaine." All this he let write in the pommel of the sword. Then Merlin let make a bridge of iron and of steel into that island, and it was but half-a-foot broad: and there shall never man pass that bridge, nor have hardiness to go over, but if he were a passing good man, and a good knight, without treachery or villany. Also, the scabbard of Balin's sword, Merlin left it on this side of the island, that Galahad should find it. Also Merlin let make, by his subtlety, that Balin's sword was put in a marble stone, standing upright, as great as a millstone, and the stone hove always above the water, and did many years: and so, by adventure, it swam down the stream to the city of Camelot, that is in English, Winchester. And that same day Galahad, the Haute Prince, came with King Arthur; and so Galahad brought with him the scabbard, and achieved the sword that was there in the marble stone, hoving upon the water; and, on Whitsunday, he achieved the sword, as it is rehearsed in the book of the Saint Grail.

